A PARISH BASE MODEL OF MINISTRY FOR AT-RISK YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN BLOUNT COUNTY TENNESSEE

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SIMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May, 2015

ABSTRACT

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This project is developed as a ministry model for Bethel Missionary Baptist Church and community. Blount County is populated with far too many persons who have fallen into drug abuse, aimlessness, school drop outs and criminal activity. An organization will be developed called "Men In Christ" that will address these issues by bringing the gospel to bare on these lives. These men will serve as tutor and mentors while collaborating with the local high schools and the courts (networking with a judge) for alternative sentencing. The mixed methodology approach with qualitative and quantitative will be used to measure the results.

United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio

Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would never have been able to finish this thesis without the guidance of my committee members, help from friends and support from my family and wife. I thank God that after many years of struggling a dream is becoming a reality in my life. I would like to express thanks to my wife and children for their love and support during the development of this endeavor. I also wish to thank my church family, Bethel Baptist Church, for their financial support.

I am appreciative of Dr. and Mrs. Harold Hudson who demonstrated love and support for me in pursuit of this dream. Also, I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Robert Walker, one of my mentors, who supported me at every needed encounter to complete this project. Finally, I wish to expresses my deepest gratitude to Dr. Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr. for his excellent guidance, caring, patience and for providing advice needed to complete this research. Dr. Cummings continually encouraged me through numerous challenging moments in order to complete this project. His insightfulness, expertise and kindness shown will never be forgotten, and I wish to express a special thanks to him.

Finally, I say thanks again to my wife, Gloria Miller. She stood by me with her help and challenged me to persevere through the good and the bad times. Her strong will at times was frustrating, but her love for me and my family enabled the fruition of this project.

DEDICATION

This writing is dedicated to the memory of two important men who played very important, yet different roles in my life: my father, Reverend Ralph J. Miller, Sr., and the doctor who delivered me, Dr. Benjamin E. Washington. These two men were giants in my life for two main reasons. In each their own way, they never gave up on me and always gave their best into my life. Both of these men exhibited great strength and faith and both conscientiously promoted my spiritual productivity. They left this world promoting the importance of hard work and higher education. They taught that even the largest task could be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
MIC	Men In Christ
ALCOA	Alcoa Aluminum Company of America

INTRODUCTION

In the Parable of the Last Judgment found in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks a word about "in as much as you have not done it to the least" which serves as a starting point here. This parable is possibly the most frightening expression of Jesus who speaks harsh words to those who are insensitive to the needs of others. This passage speaks a word about both mission and social engagement to persons who are in need. The requisites for those in need were not limited to members of Israel's community of faith (the local synagogue) nor neighbor or family. Rather, the emphasis is on those in need. In today's society, in most corners, there are countless persons in need. Numbered among them are youth and young adults. Many persons in these age groups are enrolled in school, focused and moving forward on what seems like a steady course. Many of these persons have home environments, neighborhoods, schools and other institutions where a considerable amount of nurture and guidance are intact. Sadly though, there are too many neighborhoods where the opposite exists. Notwithstanding the point that many youth from these latter communities attend school, work and move forward on a shaky but steady course, too many are not on solid footing and lead lives that are destructive and without purpose. How then are they treated by society and its systems and structures? More importantly, how are these person recognized and treated by the church (community of faith)?

The need is great. Many people cower under the prospect of even where to begin. Some speak of their own pain, struggles and how they got over. The thought here

is that if these people were more focused and discipline, they could overcome the perils of this aimlessness and despair. This rings with a measure of logic and truth. Yet, these responses are not rooted in a faith that not only calls us to worship but also sends us forward to serve. With these thoughts in mind, this overall thesis and ministry project model is to organize a men's mission group called Men in Christ (from this point known as MIC) composed of men from The Bethel Baptist Church where the writer serves as pastor along with other men in the community who presently participate in an ecumenical intercessory prayer group at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church (from this point referred to as Bethel Church). The project title is "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee." The premise of this endeavor is that too many youth and young adults find themselves in a web of temptation when it comes to drug abuse, pre-marital sex, illegal activities and a lifestyle of aimlessness. Too many persons in these groups are caught up in monitoring by the criminal justice system. There is a high rate of pregnancy among unwed mothers and too many fathers have walked away from their responsibilities of caring for their children and are noticeably absent from their lives. Against this backdrop the word of God is brought to bear.

The Introduction of this document puts forth the present reality of this pathos of aimlessness. Years ago a popular expression entered our jargon: "Just say no." This expression was first espoused in the context of staying away from drugs. As people of faith, it is not enough to "just say no." It is equally important of giving people something to which they can say "yes."

Chapter One of this document speaks to the writer's autobiographical life. It addresses a measure of a time line along with his educational and professional

attainments. Included in this section is a portion of his faith journey that has resulted in the person that he is today. It speaks to some of the influences in his life and interest areas. It also speaks of his passion and gifts for ministry.

Chapter Two explores some of the existing literature on the subject of ministry to young people. More specifically, it addresses some of the writings on the "why" of things for this age group and how specific models of ministry are proposed and carried out to disadvantaged and troubled youth.

Chapter Three outlines the biblical foundation for this thesis and project model. The first part of this chapter addresses the Theoretical Foundation of the Focus Group. The Focus Group that the writer is a part of is "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis." This puts in context that though this project is missional in perspective, part of the work of Christian discipleship is rooted in the passion and proclamation of the prophets of old that call the people to turn to God and live lives of holiness. The Biblical Foundation of this section addresses the Old Testament text of I Samuel 10:20-26 and the New Testament text Luke 10:1-8. These texts will be examined against the backdrop of academia but also practical engagement. The next section is the Historical Foundation. It explores some of the timeline of history in how faith has been expressed in dealing with the marginalized. The next section, Theological Foundation, highlights some of the existing narrative of theologians in how they engage the subject of outreach in a theological framework.

The Fourth Chapter, Methodology, addresses the methodology and its design. It speaks to how a mixed methodology format was used with pre- and post-test questionnaires employed. It also points out certain specifications of this type of research.

Chapter Five gives an overview of the field experience of this project. It underscores what happened, when and how it unfolded. In this unit a timeline is shared along with how a sermon series and bible study series undergirded the faith component. Chapter Six gives a summary and conclusion of the overall project. In this unit the writer points out some of the joys, frustrations and disappointments. A summary of learning is shared in what the writer discovered about himself, this project along with the church that he serves and the community of which he is a part. Lastly, Chapter Six speaks to some of the surprises, discoveries, setbacks and triumphs of the project. It also speaks to what the writer would do differently if he were launching this project anew in another church. Observations will also be shared about what can be added should this model be replicated elsewhere.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Spiritual Autobiography

This narrative is prefaced with a note of gratitude that the writer feels for what has taken place in his life in spite of the difficulties that were experienced along the way. It was through the highs and the lows that shaped his life and enabled him to travel the road that was laid out before him with the faith and hope that came from a wonderful family that was instrumental in his development.

One of the greatest experiences one can have in life is to grow up in an environment where there is an outstanding display of love and affection. The writer's father was a well-respected family man and a Christian who loved God and his family very much. It was obvious that the church and community were a very important part of the Miller's life. The family is made up of the parents, who married in 1939. To that union three girls were born. Their names were Wilma, Erma, and Joyce. The parents of these children loved each one immensely. However, before 1940, the oldest child, Wilma, started showing signs of a terrible illness. The only doctor in touch was Dr. Washington, a fine man who was loved by the community. He was treating Wilma, the oldest child, for a bad cold. When she seemed to be getting worse, she was taken to another doctor who apparently had more training at the time. He diagnosed her with tuberculosis. Because Wilma had been treated for a common cold for an extended period of time, it was nothing that the doctor could do. She died at the age of four. Dr.

Washington was never blamed for the death of Wilma and he continued to be a friend and the family doctor.

The father of this household was desirous to father a son having had three girls and had expressed this to Dr. Washington, who was still a good friend of the Miller family. On August 3, 1943, Ralph J. Miller, Jr. was born. Before going any further in this story, it needs to be noted this birth was not without challenge. This delivery was not ordinary to a degree. R. J., as he was later called, did not breathe for some time after delivery. Those who knew of the situation said that Dr. Washington worked profusely to get this child to respond to life. The writer was told that any other doctor would have given up, but because this doctor, being a friend of the family, and not diagnosing the older child correctly, refused to give up until R.J. began to breath. The mother of this child was said to have gotten a cold due to the water being splashed on her in the doctor's effort to get the baby to breathe.

Having been told this story by relatives, including parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, the writer grew up during the coming formative years being told of an unusual birth. This young man grew up believing that there was something miraculous about his birth and that God had a definite plan for his life. Thanks to a close-knit family who believed in the power of God, there was never a doubt that his life was going to be influenced by the things he learned in the home and community out of which he came.

Two other children were born into this family: Peggy Miller-Hill, born in 1946, and Gary S. Miller, born in 1949. Peggy was also a victim of polio in 1952 and was paralyzed in her left arm and right leg. However, in spite of this ailment, she lived a very productive life as a social worker and ran for political office (city council) in

Connecticut. She and her brother enjoyed a closeness that may have been because their ages were just a few years apart. They were in college together and shared many delightful moments discussing political issues and how they would change the world. Unfortunately, Peggy passed from this life in November 2001 as a result of cancer. She fought this battle so courageously and with dignity. Nonetheless, she left a loving husband, Logan and two children, Malaika and Kenyan to cherish her memory.

The Early Years

Life for Ralph was good during the first eight years of life in spite of the tight grip that segregation had on the lives of Negroes which was noticed at such an early age. A loving family and a wonderful neighborhood certainly were assets. However, one could really see that things seemed different in the Alcoa Aluminum town where this family lived. Segregation existed and was a problem for those who were in the community. Ralph was informed that the schools for Negroes only went to the eighth grade. When you are informed at such an early age that your school did not have high school graduation until 1939, one becomes disturbed. The Negro school, as it was referred to, began with the first to the eighth grade from 1919 up until sometime in the 1920s when they were allowed to extend to the eleventh. If someone was to go beyond the eleventh grade, they had to go to another city, Knoxville, Tennessee, in order to complete high school. When the state started paying for the school books, the Negro school got the ones that were used by the white students.

Sitting on the back of the bus presented a problem. There were noticeable differences encountered by the town in which the writer lived that were difficult to

understand and accept. School books used by the Negro students were those that were previously used by the white students. When new books were purchased for the white schools, the old, outdated ones were used by the Negroes who attended Hall School. This created rebellious feelings regarding self-worth that were difficult for those who were a part of these circumstances. Even the football and other athletic equipment were old and used. It caused you to grow up questioning the possibilities and directions for what was referred to as second-class citizen.

The highlight of the community were the holiday activities. These activities brought so much joy to the community, and the church was also a valuable force in the community. However, the church services during the earlier years were filled with singing and praising; but until the teenage years came, there did not appear to be any gripping place in the practices of the faith to really hold on to. There were many opportunities to get caught up in an emotional frenzy, but no substance accompanied the experiences. There didn't seem to be anything to attach the faith to what the feelings were about. There were bible stories being told from the pulpit which sounded good, but there didn't seem to be any aspect of life to attach them in a meaningful way.

The Influence of the Home

The greater influences received came from the home. What seemed to be the gospel, as one could understand it, was seen in the behavior of RJ's father in the house. He was a deacon in the church where the family attended. There were several members of the church who believed that the call to ministry was within reach for Ralph Miller, Sr., as he later admitted after responding to the call in 1957. After receiving the training

that was available during that time, he received a pastorate that extended over a period of thirty-two years.

R J's faith journey began in November of 1952. Awakened by a severe headache on Sunday morning, November 16, 1952, and having experienced no signs of relief after two hours, a visit to the emergency room took place. There was no reason found to retain him as a patient; however, it was discovered that a return visit at dawn revealed a spinal tap was needed. This procedure indicated a diagnosis of polio. The patient was immediately taken to Knoxville General Hospital located approximately fifteen miles north of Alcoa, Tennessee. For the next three to four weeks, life took a tremendous turn. The disease required complete bed rest the entire time. With the hospital being segregated, the patients were placed in what was referred to as wards. At least four were in the area where the R J was located. This, being an extremely difficult period, was viewed from a child's perspective and everything pointed to helplessness and hopelessness. There were children in iron lungs losing their lives daily. There were cries of help and signs of frustration due to lack of understanding what was happening and the lack of human touch from parents or loved ones. It was during these trying times that the power of God became evident in R J's life. The mere fact that a nine-year old was struggling with a disease, and then comprehending the magnitude of the circumstance and its impact on life, was unfair and too burdensome for a youngster to grasp or embrace. The loneliness from isolation and the uncertainty of seeing another day loomed big in the life of R J. He thought many times about the comforting and calming of his fears and frustrations, and more importantly, how would his body ever be whole again. The one constant in life was his father's steadfastness and love. However, on one

particular night, Ralph, Sr. through the cold and the snow, found his way to R J's room window. His father prayed and encouraged his heart, calming those very anxieties that were earlier haunting his very soul. This was, and still is, a precious moment, a turning point moment that life was given this man child, lasting over sixty years.

Traumas that are experienced by members in the Christian community are referred to as "night seasons." There is a song that is sung in the church today entitled "God Leads Us Along." One of the verses reads:

> Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
> In the night season and all the day long. [1]

This time was indicative of the night season in R J's life and it brought the power of God on the scene as the needed anchor that grips when all else has let go and relinquished their grip on any life, but in particular, on this life. The doubts and fears that can accompany any illness can be overwhelming, and polio is a double whammy-type illness that can make life delirious and uncertain; however, one comes to know that the Spirit of man is greater than doubts, fears, and illness.

Upon returning to school in January 1953, R J experienced great hope and joy because of the recovery over polio. Learning that recovery brings responsibility, opportunities arose to discuss issues about polio. Fearing the unknown always generates questions from others, and others were interested in knowing how it affects a person who really has recovered. By the time high school arrived, complete recovery had manifested totally in R J's body. Physical activities that included football, running, and playing were accomplished.

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[1] George A Young, "God Leads Us Along," Discipleship Ministries: The United Methodist Church, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.gbod.org/resources/god-leads-us-along1.

Meeting the Savior

R J met Christ as his personal Savior in June of 1953. As he recalls, he had not given any thought that this would happen on this particular Sunday in June. That Sunday stands out in his memory. When the great grandmother heard what had happened, she rejoiced over the fact that R J (whom the family refers to him as) had sought salvation. A few months before this occurrence, a mother of the church had witnessed to R J about the conversion experience that he would have.

By the time he reached high school, there seemed to be no problems with R J's health, which was a surprise to many of the people who knew of the previous illness. Several years after the recovery, there were doubts in the minds of some as to whether participation in a contact sport as physical as football would be possible. What most people were not familiar with was the work ethic instilled in his childhood. This ethic provided the physical and mental strength necessary for complete recovery of any malady. The manifesting pride in accomplishing this goal led R J to become tough minded in the world of academia and physically tough to train and build the body to perform on command. This is an ongoing process that has lasted over fifty years. This came about as a result of battling polio and the winner unanimously was R J.

The High School and College Years

James D. White, the high school football coach (now deceased), had a dual role in R J's life. First, White was not only instrumental in the writer's educational endeavors but also in coaching football. His words were direct yet profound; "be your best always." On the advice of White, playing college football was suggested for R J because of his

ability of understanding and playing the game of football. It was refreshing for Miller to find a known individual who was interested in his playing skills but was also a Christian man outside his immediate household. White was in the writer's life, until his death in 2003, and worked with the writer in many capacities from sports with the writer and children in the community, educational endeavors with youth, fellowshipping in church-related functions and the passion of both educators of gardening and growing vegetables.

R J finished high school in May of 1961. The high school principal, Mr. J. A. Matthews, a very fine Christian man, got four of the young men from Hall School into Morristown College. Three of the four had played high school football and thought for sure that they would make the team at Morristown College. However, when they arrived, they were informed that due to the lack of finances, there would be no more football starting the fall of 1962. Needless to say, this was a terrible blow to many of the young men who were enrolling at the college whose dream it was to play college football.

It took a while to get over the disappointment, but things got better as the Alcoa young men became acclimated to college life without football. The new goal was to make the best out of the college experience. Morristown College was a United Methodist school and there were strict rules that were insisted on being followed. It was imperative that all students attend the vesper services on Wednesdays. Sudden death may well have been the only excuse for not being there. These services were the greatest spiritual experience R J had ever had up until that time. They were thought provoking, spirit-filled, so much so that the God within him cried out for utterance. These four young men were inspired to join the college choir. Trips or tours all over the northeast were taken

for fundraising. The president of the college, Dr. Gibson, would give speeches whenever the choir traveled.

Miller went to Morristown Junior College in hopes of playing football, but he found Christ in a meaningful way in the chapel one Wednesday evening. Again, a wonderful time was had and he met many wonderful people: both faculty and students. After graduating from this institution in May of 1963, R J enrolled at Kentucky State College in Frankfort, Kentucky. The plan was to play football at this college. Excited about finally getting an opportunity to play, the coach sent him to the infirmary for a physical exam. The results of that visit ended all hope of ever playing college football. R J left Kentucky State College in January 1964 and enrolled at Tennessee A & I State in Nashville, Tennessee. The emphasis had changed by this time because getting a degree and giving the effort needed to graduate was the goal. R J had an additional responsibility at this school in helping to care for one of his sisters who was in school and had great challenges. Unfortunately at this time, his faith began to decline. It was not that he was unsure about his belief; it was that educational endeavors and work preoccupied most of his time.

Prior to finishing the undergraduate degree at Tennessee State University, R J's mother wrote him a letter and informed him that he would need to think seriously about settling down and considering marriage. The maturity level, as far as marriage was concerned, just was not there; although there were several acquaintances that were in his life, there was not a serious concern about marriage. For some reason, his mother knew that one of his best childhood friends had recently married, and his mother continued to

stress the need to be married before embarking upon a career. Eventually, R J relented and followed her advice and married.

Young Adulthood

After graduating from college, R J moved to Detroit to begin a career teaching school. His marriage was very turbulent, and it was not long before it ended in divorce. Both parties tried to make the relationship amiable, but there were too many obstacles. A failed relationship left him depressed for a period of time. There were also feeling of guilt that took some time to overcome.

R J became more involved in his work as a counselor and talked and taught about the perils of poor decision making and the lack of commitment, not only in relationships, but also in walks of life. The experience of failure in his life made him a better person in many ways. It took a long time for him to accept God's forgiveness for what had taken place in his life that could have been avoided if more time was spent seeking God's direction in this matter.

A turning point occurred when he visited a church pastored by the late Dr. Fredrick G. Sampson. The sermon preached that day spoke to many intensely. Dr. Sampson stated in that sermon that "our horizons, as believers, are not stationary but can be pushed back or moved."[2] That sermon changed R J's life. He left that church knowing that he was a changed man and as he expressed it, "I could now walk in the twilight of an after while that is not yet."[3] R J was richly blessed that day in April 1975.

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[2] Frederick G. Sampson, "Sermon Untitled." Tabernacle Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan, April 1975.

[3] Ibid.

A New Era in Faith Development.

R J met the love of his life the following year in April; her name was Gloria Phillips. The two dated and later married on December 27, 1978. Dr. Frederick G. Sampson remained a friend and advisor in R J's life for many years. He made visits to the school where he was a counselor and addressed the student body on several occasions. R J had many enjoyable years in the counseling area while in Detroit. He had the respect of parents, church members and all of the principals with whom he worked. Some of the most rewarding moments in his life were the times spent working with many students. They were very responsive to the instructions that this teacher/counselor shared with them. Every member who came to his classroom was required to learn and recite the poem "Myself" by Edgar Guess. The first line of the poem reads: "I have to live with myself and so I want to be fit for myself to know. I want to be able as the days go by always to look myself in the eye."[4] R J tried to make a difference in the lives of the students with whom he came in contact. Several years were spent in the Detroit Public School System.

The thrust of R J's adult life as an educator has always pointed toward outreach which often entailed reaching beyond an established location. One of the needs was to solicit involvement of outside resources in an effort to assist in the constructive input into the lives of those whose needs extended beyond a local school or church or whatever was available at the time. The realization was evident in working with students while serving as a counselor in the school system. R J observed the difficulties that student were

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[4] Edgar Guess, "Myself," Scrapbook.com, accessed January 19, 2012, http://www.scrapbook.com/poems/doc/1709.html.

experiencing in the school environment were more than just school-related problems. Many of the student lacked the training that was expected to be available in the home such as practicing good manners and common courtesy. There were times when parents seemed overwhelmed at the behavior of their own children's conduct. As a result of these difficulties, group counseling sessions were implemented to help students deal with behavioral issues.

In spite of the amicable work that R J was doing in the school system in Detroit, there was a nagging within to get more involved in ministry. Though it was considered a form of ministry, counseling and assisting in the local church in Christian Education at Mt. Olive Baptist Church, there was more that was desired on R J's part. After discussing the ministry interest with his pastor in Detroit, it was suggested that training could be achieved there in this city. There was something about staying in the city that was unsettling, although there was no mention of it to anyone. The thought of the missed opportunity to attend the seminar in Atlanta, Georgia, began to swell up in his mind. Reverend Dan Williams, who had attempted to get R J to attend the seminary in Atlanta, had died in his pulpit following a Sunday sermon. It appeared doors of opportunity would not open for R J to gain training for his envisioned ministry. Prayer over the matter was offered and no more was said about it for several months.

R J continued his work in Detroit not really knowing what was in store for the desire of his heart. There was one thing for sure; and that was, if God had something for him to do, He would reveal it in His own timing. Having worked up to the end of 1977, it looked as though very little was going to change anytime soon. In the early part of March 1978, while traveling to church with his wife one evening, as the two drew closer

to their destination, his wife said, "RJ, if you are going to be the minister you desire to be, you must have the training necessary to accomplish that ministry." For some wonderful reason, R J heard like he had never heard before what he needed and was destined to do. Contact was made with the seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, and during spring break the next month, the Millers were on their way to Georgia to inquire about enrolling for school at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). They were accompanied on this trip by his wife's parents.

When they reached Atlanta, it seemed as if things had been waiting for the arrival of the Miller family. A full scholarship was offered and enrollment was to start in August 1978. There was joy unspeakable and a little fear that thing were turning out so wonderfully. There were many questions they asked themselves and very few answers were given; it appeared that doors of opportunity were now opening for R J to be immersed in a training environment.

R J was indebted to his wife for having the courage and willingness to leave an established place of work and comfort and go to an environment that was much different than the one where they were living. R J wish that he could say that everything was smooth sailing, but this was not the case. With the assistance of a colleague of his father, an apartment was secured at a place called Bethel Tower Apartment on the historic Auburn Avenue. At this point life was beginning for him as a seminarian. The learning, teaching and fellowship were very inspiring. One of the most memorable time for him there was when Dr. Howard Thurman spoke at one of the chapel services. His wisdom was very enlightening. A close friendship was developed at ITC with Kenneth W.

Cummings, Sr. They both arrived at ITC at the same time and have shared their pulpits and friendship lo these many years.

A Time of Relocation

After graduating from ITC the Miller family moved to Maryville, Tennessee, the birth place where his parents lived. His wife took a job at the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). R J did not pursue a pastorate at that time. He became an Associate Pastor at Bethel Church where he was responsible for the church's Christian education program. Fifteen months later, he was asked by Rev. Stone N. Carr to serve as Christian Education director of Rest Have Baptist Church. This was a unique event because this church was formed as a result of the split between two churches in 1956. Of the many ministries that were developed at this time, a prison ministry was quite popular with the members. R J served at this church from 1982 to 1984. During this time he also worked as a counselor at Knoxville College and later as the director of admission.

In July of 1984, Emmanuel United Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, asked R J to consider the position as interim pastor of the church. This invitation was accepted. During the first two years at Emmanuel Church youth groups were developed along with activities that brought family members together. Many person who were not members of the church enjoyed the activities. A youth choir was formed. Members were added to the church regularly. Evening programs were started where other churches were involved. There was excitement in the community brought on by the various outreach activities. Many who had left the church previously had come back and rededicated themselves to Christ. This was R J's first pastorate. Wonderful thing happened. R J

served this church for ten productive years. This church was no longer an isolated dwelling but an outreach center where the believers gathered for worship. R J left this church in December 1994. Amiable relationships were continued to the present day. Even to this day R J has been called upon to deliver eulogies at this church.

The Bethel Church Years

From the years 1995 through 2001, an opportunity to teach community bible classes was presented to R J. This joyous experience led him to eventually pastor the church currently being served. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Word of God had transformed R J's life to such an extent that the urge to share the goodness of the word soon became overpowering. This event drew individuals from all walks of life and all churches within the community. The cohesiveness between the people that came to study proved that it's not the location, nor even the building, but it's who (Christ) and what (his goodness) that is being taught in those various places. The dialogue, atmosphere, and God-inspired questions provided growth for all involved: ministers and laity alike. The bible "is" a living organism and the Spirit of God became so paramount that the building swelled with God's power and God's Spirit. When the time came to move to the next phase of R J's spiritual encounter, a sense of finding what the next rung on the ladder held was welcomed.

Although a pastorate was not sought, many churches approached R J to make application. The love of ministry for him was the ministry of teaching the great dynamics housed within the bible. Various avenues of training were attended; they include World Changers Ministries in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Columbia Theological Seminary in

Decatur, Georgia. Without becoming too discombobulated about the intended purpose, a reassessment concerning the goal God had set up for this vessel was evaluated and explored. To expand beyond the comfort zone that life offers, R J can recall the wisdom that has been dropped along the way by such giants as Rev. W. C. Morrison, Alcoa, TN; Rev. Daniel Williams, Nashville, Tennessee; Dr. Fredrick Sampson, Detroit, Michigan; Dr. Major Jones, ITC Atlanta, Georgia; Dr. G. Murray Branch, the Old Testament Professor at ITC; Dr. Bobby Joe Saucer, Dean, Morehouse School of Religion; Dr. Jonathan Jackson, Professor, ITC; Dr. R. B. Gayton, Detroit; Rev. Jack Ealy, former pastor in Detroit, and many, many others. The nuggets they held blessed, empowered, and grew spiritual muscle in R J's life.

Years had quickly passed and now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Bethel Baptist Church's bugle sounded for Ralph J. Miller, Jr.'s expertise. News had spread about a teacher/counselor blessing individuals housed within the Alcoa community and the outreach being ubiquitous at every turn. The study of God's word is not only necessary but needed in the community that housed Bethel. Outreach was imperative, but reaching in was required before outward signs could be addressed. Healing always begins internally and manifests without what has already taken place within. Since this was the case, bible study classes were held every Tuesday and Wednesday. Spiritual counseling was provided dealing with life's challenges that crop up in each and every life lived. With the church knowing and understanding the importance of community outreach, the clarion call was accepted for full-time ministry at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. Bethel Church is a place where everybody is somebody and Christ is all! To continuously expand and work within the community, a

part-time school counseling position continued, along with the demands of church ministry.

The Church's Ministry

There are many outreach programs that the church provides which are inclusive of jobs for the unemployed and tutoring for students who are in need of help in math, reading, and language arts. Numbered among the ministries developed and strengthened are Christian education classes, youth and adult bible study on Wednesday evenings and Saturday morning intercessory prayer to stand in the gap as Jesus is standing in the gap for every believer. The entire community is welcome even though it is held at Bethel Church because of Miller's affiliation to the church. The word says "where there is no vision, the people perish" [Proverbs 29:18]. Therefore, the belief is that to have vision, one must be taught and the teaching must be applied as directed by the word of God. The word is a premium commodity and is constantly stressed in every aspect of ministry, not only by the pastor, but the officers of the church. The importance of competent teachers is stressed, mainly due to the fact that Christian values are so important to today's youth. Losing a generation due to ignorance of the word must be placed on God's people so that His kingdom becomes on earth as it is in heaven.

A viable church is one that meets the needs across the board, from babies to youth, from youth to adults, and adults to the elderly. One activity that honors the elderly but includes every age group, takes place on the last Sunday in October. As God's fall begins to turn to winter, Bethel Church celebrates this new phase by traveling to the Great Smokey Mountains National Park to view the changing colors of the leaves. They

worship God's greatness and goodness in the mountains and through the fellowship of dinner under the open heavens. Again, this affair is open to and attended by members of other churches in the Alcoa community as well. Ten praise-filled, Holy Ghost years have been enjoyed by outreach and love through the insight of the Holy Spirit in R J's life at Bethel Church. In discussing activities for the senior citizens, a last culminating activity for them takes place on the second Sunday in December.

A Closing Note

The ministry that R J envisions is one that emphasizes the teaching and application of the word of God. Everywhere that R J has gone and served as pastor, he has placed a premium on the word that hast to be understood and practiced. There are no selection of officers without biblical knowledge and application. Family bible study is stressed by R J for the officers of the church. It is imperative that competent teachers are assigned to teach Christian values to the youth. Provisions are made for every youth who is a member of the church to be involved in all youth activities with emphasis on the value of the word of God in life's' journey.

R J is grateful to God for all of the opportunities that have been provided for him to teach and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the hope of this gospel preacher and teacher to continually grow in wisdom and knowledge and fulfill the call of God in his life. The ultimate goal for R J as a believer is to be an embodiment of one that spreads the knowledge of Christ everywhere like a sweet perfume. His life can be summed up as one striving for the Christ-like fragrance that rises up to God and impacts the lives of

those with whom interfaces with daily. This is only accomplished because God's scent is being sprayed on him on this pilgrim's journey.

As a teacher he constantly pushed students in the understanding that learning is a lifelong enterprise. This is true for R J even today. He once started a doctoral program at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, some years ago but did not finish it. About three years ago, approaching seventy years of age, he inquired about the doctoral program from his friend Dr. Kenneth Cummings, an adjunct faculty at United Theological Seminary (UTS). He visited the campus with Dr. Cummings for one of the Intensive and was hooked. R J then enrolled in the program at UTS and was in the Kenneth Copeland group. After a year, he asked Dr. Hudson for permission to change groups and was given permission. He then joined the "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis" group led by co-mentors: Dr. Robert Walker and Dr. Kenneth Cummings, Sr. The time spent at UTS for the Intensives and the interim focus group times with the mentors have been extremely rewarding. R J is still on the journey of faith – praising God along the way.

Context

The setting where R J's ministry takes place is Blount County, Tennessee. Established in 1795, Blount County (Tennessee) is one of the oldest counties in Tennessee. It takes its named after the territorial Governor William Blount. This area was home to the Cherokee Indians. White settlers began to settle in this area in the mid-1870s. The county seat for the county (at that time and still is today) is Maryville which takes its name after Governor's Blount wife, Mary Grainger Blount. Maryville became a

medium-sized city in the 19th Century. Maryville College is located in this town. The original name for this college was Southern and Western Theological Seminary. This was of note to R J in particular because this school was among the first southern schools to enroll Native Americans, African Americans and women.[5]

Blount County has a fascinating history as it pertains to a north-verses-south mentality.

> During the Civil War many residents of Blount County supported the Union, as did much of East Tennessee. General William T. Sherman quartered in Maryville with approximately thirty thousand men in December 1863. Quakers at Friendsville [adjacent to Marysville] helped over two thousand Tennessee men to escape conscription in the Confederate army.[6]

Adding to the history of this area, "Sam Houston, one of the most famous Blount County residents, move there (Maryville) with his family from Virginia in 1807. In 1812 Houston taught school in a one-room schoolhouse, now preserved as a state historic site, near Maryville."[7]

Blount County Today

One of five municipalities in Blount County, Alcoa is a city located in Tennessee at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains, one of the most gorgeous sites in the world. It is one of the most visited places of all the national historic sites. Prior to 1919, Alcoa was called North Maryville. However, in 1919, the Aluminum Company of America

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[5] The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, accessed March 7, 2012, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=102.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

(ALCOA) built its plant there, and it was named Alcoa thus replacing the name North Maryville. It became incorporated in 1919.

Although ALCOA was a financial boom for the city Alcoa, that bears its name, some of the jobs there were quite dangerous. The pot rooms and the carbon plant where the aluminum was bake in pots was a dangerous job. When the hot molten aluminum splashed on the body (as well as the hands, arms and legs), it made deep, painful and hard-to-heal burns. Hospital visits for blacks were not encouraged nor given for these employees during these occasions. Therefore, extreme caution had to be sought to avoid serious injury. There were Mexicans and Afro-American hired to work these jobs because a large work force was needed. Alcoa sent recruiters into Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi to obtain unskilled black labor. These workers were brought in by night train from the Deep South and processed for employment the following morning. There were many who came and found that the work was not what they expected or were told.

When Alcoa sought the help of the black workers in other areas, a recruiting pamphlet was widely circulated which painted an enticing picture of what the work was to have been. With these workers coming from other areas where they existed as sharecroppers, a job with this company was a step up from their previous types of work known to them. However, when these workers came to Alcoa, things were not exactly the way they were referenced in the pamphlets. The hours were not short, nor were the working conditions excellent, and chances for promotion were not offered.

The workers brought in from the South were encouraged to relocate their families as soon as they could. In relocating their families, the thinking of the recruiters was for the workers to experience a more civil life and be less footloose. For many, this was far

better living than what they had previously enjoyed. There were some who could not adjust to this type of work because of the danger. Other types of jobs were sought that paid less than the $1.50 an hour wage offered by the Aluminum Company.

Schooling was provided for the children in the community through the eighth grade. Blacks who had some form of education were recruited as teachers. Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, provided teachers who were hired by the Aluminum Company. Religious exercises were conducted each morning and the bible was taught as a textbook in every class in school.

The racial climate among the Negroes and whites was better than most areas in the south, but there were still challenges. By the 1960s, there were Negroes on the Alcoa Police Force. Some of them became firemen while others were in the school system as administrators, teachers, city council members, and other positions of power and prestige.

Demographics of Alcoa and Bethel Church

The population of Blount County is 125,099, according to the 2013 census (See Appendix A).[8] Alcoa's population, according to 2013 census, is 8,640. (See Appendix B). African Americans make up 14% of the population.[9] The homeownership rate is 62.7%. There are 4,175 housing units. Per capita income is $21,730.[10] According to Suburban Stats website, the male population is 4,035; and the female population is

[8] QuickFacts, accessed March 4, 2012, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/47009.html.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

4414.[11] The median age of males is thirty-eight, while the median age for females is forty-one.[12] As mentioned earlier, Alcoa is only one of five municipalities in Blount County; the other four are Maryville, Louisville (the writer's residence) Rockford and Springbrook. These separate townships almost seem to have an endless seem, meaning, unless you are a longtime residence of this area, you will not know where one town ends and another one begins. Again, R J lives in Louisville, but the church that he serves, Bethel Church, is in Alcoa. Although most of the members of Bethel Church live in Alcoa, more than a few reside in other municipalities. Although the unemployment of Blount County is 5.4%, that number is higher for blacks.[13]

The Birth of a Church

In 1916, the Aluminum Company of America, (referred from this point as ALCOA), began constructing houses in what was known as the "Black Bottom." The Reverend W. H. Howard of Americus, Georgia, and the Reverend James Wilson of Montgomery, Alabama, came to Alcoa, Tennessee. These ministers began holding prayer meetings from house to house until at one of the prayer meetings, a committee was appointed to petition Superintendent Glascock for a place for the blacks to worship. The committee members on record were Reverend Howard, Deacon Lewis, Deacon Nelson and Mr. William Jackson. Superintendent Glascock received this committee with the highest respect and prepared a temporary church in Black Bottom. Thus, Bethel

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[11] Suburban Stats, accessed March 4, 2012, http://suburbanstats.org/population/tennessee/how-many-people-live-in-alcoa.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Alfred Archival Economic Data, accessed March 5, 2013, http://alfred.stlouisfed.org/series?seid=TNBLOU0URN.

Missionary Baptist Church (from this point in the narrative as Bethel Church) was organized and dedicated. After the dedication, Reverend Howard was called as the pastor of this historical church.

Bethel has progressed through the years, having met in many locations including the Commercial Building which was located at the corner of Hall Road and East Howe Street. Several pastors served this church throughout the years, namely, Reverend Fitch, Reverend Daniel Robinson, Reverend Hester and Reverend Ingram.

On February 22, 1928, Reverend L. S. Davis of Georgia was extended an invitation to conduct a revival at Bethel Church. Through this evangelism campaign, many souls were saved. In 1929, Reverend L. S. Davis called the deacon and trustee boards together to talk of building a church. Those involved were Rufus Lenoir, Thomas Lenoir, Wallace Davis, Richard Styles, Walter Tucker, Floyd Turner, and Abe Walker. Recommendations were made to the church and afterwards an agreement on a site was made. There was a ground breaking ceremony on the land secured. This spot is the present location of Bethel Church. The men of the church gave their labor, and the women of the church served meals on the grounds as the men labored. The church, a wood frame building, was completed in 1930, but on December 12, the structure was completely destroyed by fire. Due to much prayer and determination, a new brick structure was built on the same foundation and was completed by the end of 1933.

The esteemed past pastors of this historic edifice as noted in the church's records are Rev. W. H. Howard, Rev. Ware, Rev. Sharp, Rev. L. S. Davis, Rev. M. C. Harris, Rev. J. C. Woods, Rev William C. Morrison, Rev. William H. Lewis, Rev. Richard S.

Brown, Rev. Stone N. Carr, Rev. Cordell E. Simpson and presently, Rev. Ralph J. Miller, Jr.[14]

Church Polity and Organization

Like most churches of the Baptist tradition, Bethel Church has a deacon board and a trustee board. The deacon board of Bethel Church, like many other churches, misses the mark on its meaning and purpose. As spelled out in the book of Acts, persons serving on the board are supposed to be assistant to the pastors with pastoral duties; instead, it sees itself as the controlling entity of the church and keeping the pastor in check. The trustee board is responsible for oversight of the building and the finances. Bethel Church also have boards and committees that tend to the work of outreach, Christian education, senior adults, scouting and prayer services.

Present Ministry at Bethel Church

As the newly appointed pastor, the writer's goal was to implement programs that would enhance a place where each member could find their own place in God's kingdom. With this goal in mind, the first ministry launched was a weekly bible study for all ages which included youth to young adults to middle-age adults to seniors. Not only was bible study implemented but also other programs. A weekly men's group was launched as well as a monthly programs which fed senior citizens a meal and had them delivered. Other ministry started included Boys Scouts of America and a prison ministry, especially for church members and relatives of church members. This ministry touched the lives of

[14] Bethel Missionary Baptist Church Historical Records.

many individuals who have been affected by drugs in various forms. This pastor has spent countless hours counseling with inmates in jail whom the pastor knew. Parents of inmates would, on occasion, ask the pastor if he would go with them to court for the sentencing of their family members. On many of the jail visits, other inmates that the writer knew from early times were also recipients of this ministry. R J had an opportunity to minister to some of the staff as well as police personnel.

As a bi-vocational minister, R J worked at the Alcoa Middle School and later Alcoa High School as a counselor. There were times during the school year that students would confide in R J about the usage and dependence on marijuana and other drugs. As a result of this problem, the counselor would invite former drug addicts to come in and share with students the problems they faced including addiction, a life of crime to support their habit and time spent in jail and prison for arrest and conviction. Parents who were having difficulties with their children using drugs were helped by some of those who willingly offered their services to those parents, if they desired to involve them. Jail ministry is presently planned for any youth who desires to live and practice a drug-free existence.

As a person in this community, through R J's efforts as both pastor and school counselor, he sees daily lives of members of the church and others being caught up in the web of drugs and other demonic devices. The women within the church have not been overlooked by this pastor. A women's ministry has evolved to enhance the lives of those women who have children they are raising – some of whom with husbands and some without. Some women who have reached the age of being a grandmother have something in common with those who have not; they also need God's word in their life.

They need to know how to help their daughters and daughters-in-law teach their children about God, His Son and how the word can accomplish whatever may be needed in any life. Another program implemented under R J's watch has been a tutoring program. This after-school ministry is not only for the members of the church but also children from the community. Working closely with the schools and community centers, R J believes the gap between educational needs of the students can be lessen. This program has an emphases on math, language arts and reading. Because of this service, many students have been caught before slipping into the abyss of not having enough credits to graduate. Attention has also been given to the middle-school age youth in the hope of helping them to establish a stronger academic rigor as they move through the grades.

Needful Things

The business as usual temperament will no longer be useful in addressing the many problems of youth and young adults in the Bethel Church as well as Blount County. Churches are known for church anniversaries, pastor's anniversaries and choir days. In many churches there is an annual children's day. Beyond this is Vacation Bible School. When R J was a child, the church was the center of black life for many reasons. One reason was because of segregation. Today, youth have many things that attract and hold their attention. Church is not high on their list – that is, if it is on the list at all. Many young people, once they reach their teen years, no longer attend church or find meaning in church. Years ago, an author Pierre Babin, wrote a book entitle *Adolescence in Search of a New Church.* Although R J can no longer put his finger on his copy of this book, the title itself speaks volume to this subject.

Some interesting research sheds a bird's eye view of this phenomenon.

> Six hundred and thirty-five Northern black churches were surveyed regarding the offering of youth support programs. Of these, 176 reported having at least one program directed at adolescent nonmembers of the church, primarily from low-income homes. The most common programs consisted of Christian fellowships, ministry, counseling, group discussions, rap sessions, seminars, and workshops. Sports activities were second in frequency. Least common were AIDS and youth health-related services. It appears the greatest interest in youth programs are in churches that are Methodist, older, middle-class, large in membership, owned or mortgaged, and with more paid clergy and staff. Characteristics of youth-oriented pastors are discussed. Generally, it was found that some of the most prominent issues facing black adolescents are not being adequately addressed by black churches.[15]

Bethel Church, and the seven other black churches in Blount County, are in the category where little ministry takes place. This is notwithstanding the present programs of the church. R J still believes, with the aid of the Holy Spirit and the faithfulness of a few, better days are ahead.

Synergy

An amazing thing happened in the life of this writer who grew up in an environment that offered very little hope for young African Americans. The little town referred to as Alcoa, Tennessee, was sectioned off in that the two dominant races lived in separate communities where there were many noticeable differences in the amenities that were enjoyed by both races of people. There were very few people in the black community who held jobs that provided advancements in the workplace. There were differences in the housing in terms of community climate for people of color. Without it being verbally stated, there were places in the city where blacks were not welcomed and

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[15] "The Role of The Black Church in Working with Black Adolescence," PubMed.Gov., accessed April 9, 2013, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8085479.

the difference in lifestyles left a lasting impression on the hearts of those who experienced the racing winds of racism.

However, the saving grace of many of those who experienced these problems, the church stood as the one place that allowed for African Americans to experience the presence of the transcendent power of God. This was experienced by R J as a youngster growing up in the Alcoa community, which provided him the anchor for his soul. Somehow there was a knowing that life was going to provide opportunities for R J to use the light that was within. This beacon of light has propelled him to do wonderful things for the betterment of humanity. R J was encouraged to receive Christ as his Savior at an early period in his life and that decision has made all the difference. This decision has led him to a life-long learning in the process of not only learning, but in understanding and applying the principles of that "light" that dwells within each of us. This light strengthens R J as a developer in and of the Word of God.

The awareness previously talked about brought R J back into the community where he was born and reared. R J had been away for approximately twenty years and felt compelled to return to the Alcoa community to spread the gospel to those who were in search of a better life. His work for the past thirty years allowed him to touch many lives by the use of communication skills and the sincere love of God. Many of the endeavors he implemented have to do with beyond the walls of the established church. Through reading, praying, and by observance, as well as other godly tools, R J has had the pleasure of leading others to Christ, provide jobs for many who were not working, and counseling with parents and students about the virtues of godly living. The beyond-the-walls were first used in the local church that he now serves as pastor, Bethel Church.

Writing his autobiography awakened some of the willful sleeping in areas of R J's life. The stranglehold that segregation and inequality left in his life forced him to reflect back on some of the ugly events of racial injustice. These painful experiences, accompanied by a serious illness, have given him the strength and courage to look back over his life and see the grace of God and a loving family always at his side during the most difficult periods of his young life. R J believes that his life's decision was formed during those turbulent times in life. Dr. David Jeremiah's book entitled *A Bend in the Road* is a reminder of how the transcending power of God enables the believer to overcome the vicissitudes of life and provide a platform upon which God's call could be answered to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ by teaching and speaking the Word of God wherever R J's travels would take him in this world.

R J's ministry has begun to take form based on the struggles that have accompanied his life and enabled him to see through new eyes. His belief is very strong that the mission he was placed here to do is to assist in whatever ways to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is placed on the oppressed, downtrodden, and dispossessed so that through the Word of God, they do not have to be these things for the remainder of their lives. The office of pastorate of a local church within the community is important to implement the "beyond the walls" concept of outreach ministry. This type of ministry has been strongly placed in R J's heart and it is his belief that as a community of believers we can accomplish this task. R J's contextual analysis has allowed him the insight and direction to place efforts in an arena where believers work jointly by the power of God to pointing lives in the direction of their dependence on the Holy Spirit's teaching and leading.

Although R J fulfilled the call of God on his life as a pastor, many other things are done in the community that are needful. Other things that he works on are situations such as working with parents and families. This pastor is actively involved in the life of the community not only as a pastor but also as a counselor and social worker. Having been retired from the public schools as a high school counselor, R J has been active in community outreach in such programs as the Boy Scouts, the development of targeting students who are at risk, and soliciting educators who are former teachers and business people in the community. Some of these individuals have degrees in the areas of many students' needs. This endeavor gives this pastor an opportunity to interface with a broad base of community and civic leaders. The social aspect of the work done, along with the pastorate, has given R J insight and access to many people. He presently serves on the board of the Blount County Community Action Agency, Inc. where he is involved in the low income section. These types of responsibilities provide opportunities to interface with city and county officials and in so doing provides an occasional jail ministry outreach.

Some of the people visited were former counselees known from years spent at the high school prior to retirement as a counselor. The ministry of Bethel Church is developing a model of evangelism that allows R J the privilege of sharing the gospel in a way that is consistent with the call from the Word of God found in Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore and teach nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost."

The reason for an interest in "reading" on the part of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church is centered on low-test scores that many of the students achieve (at the school

level). Two of the subgroups are blacks and the economically disadvantaged. The tests indicate that measured against their counterparts, blacks do not fare as well. The students who are a part of the community where the church is located wear the label. Currently there is an asserted effort to provide mentors and tutors for the students to enhance reading awareness. Bethel Church has extended its services to assist in helping students achieve high scores in the areas of reading, math, and the sciences. If students can develop a love of reading using faith-based strategies, a foundation is being built that enables students to get an idea of who they are in Christ. R J very much want to build the confidence of students and qualify them to go on to higher learning once they have completed high school.

The passion that burns in the heart of this pastor is to provide an atmosphere for learning in ways in which the community that was once drug infested and suffering from spiritual anemia to realize how important it is to put forth the effort to reach the potential God has preordained for their lives. R J feels strongly that there is within the body of the believers enough spiritual arsenal to assist in the development of the minds of youth and young adults and to see to it that when people put the effort in, all we do is to glorify God. He will honor our efforts. It is the responsibility of all who have been called by God to serve this present age and fulfill the task that God has prepared for each of us to achieve.

God has an amazing way to use things in one's past to bring about some ministry act of the future. All of R J's entire adult life, he has interfaced with adolescences. First as a teacher and later as a counselor. Be it the public schools of Detroit or the public schools

of Alcoa, the situation is the same: Too many young people live "lives of quiet desperation."[16] Many are resigned to dropping out of school, illicit and unsafe sex, experimenting with drugs (which often leads to addiction) and engaging in criminal activity some of which is tied to feeding a drug habit. Every day in some of the communities of Blount County one sees much of the desolation of many youth and young adults. How then is the church to engage these people and their problems? Without ever articulating it, God has given R J a ministry of engagement to young people. While pondering what is most needful in the life of this church and community, R J immediately knew that outreach to these two groups were at the top. In his peer group, "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis," the students are constantly challenged to view their context in terms of what is most needful by way of addressing and putting forth a ministry model. They were also reminded of articulating not only where their passion lies but also what are their gifts of the Spirit and how they employ them. With this in mind, R J has resolved to move forward with a project addressed to Bethel Church and the community of Blount County. Presently, there is a men's group that exist as one of study and fellowship in the church. Some of the participants are from other churches. R J is in the process of prayer with these men to develop an interdenominational men's group in the county to organize around meeting some of the challenges and problems facing the youth and young adults of this area. Out of these endeavors, a group has emerged called "Men In Christ." R J shared with the group that these efforts would be a part of the fulfillment of academic and project requirements of the doctoral program at United Theological Seminary. To this end he will be putting forth a ministry project called "A Parish Base

[16] The Walden Woods Project, accessed June 7, 2014, https://www.walden.org/Library/Quotations/The_Henry_D._Thoreau_Mis-Quotation_Page.

Model of Ministry For At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee." Without tooting his horn, he already has great rapport with many students whom he encountered in public schools as well as their parents. By faith R J affirms that hearts will be touched and lives changed because of these efforts.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY PROJECT

The challenges of meeting the needs of young people, especially people of color, is so great that it involves many sharp minds and faithful souls to address -- not to mention the aid of the Holy Spirit. This task cannot be handled alone. A collaborative effort is involved. Many people err in thinking that they have to create a template to address or handle this grave situation. Others think why do anything because the task is insurmountable. Nothing can be farther from the truth. There are ideas afloat by way of strategies found in many books and there are programs or ministries that are underway in some churches. To address this issue of putting forth a ministry for "at-risk" youth and young adults, the writer has first searched out some of the literature that is available on this subject matter.

Casting the Vision

In his epistle to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul spoke forth words that have resounded with the writer not only as a minister but also as a preacher. Those words, "we preach Christ," [I Cor 1:23][1] serves as a clarion call. While delving into the particularities for models of ministry, a preacher must be undergirded with a sense of

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all scripture reference are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, National Council of Churches of Christ U.S.A., Inc., 1989, used by permission.

"purpose" and "vision." A launching place for any ministry project, this one included, can be grounded in H. Beecher Hicks, Jr.'s book, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks.* The objective for including this book as a reading source in this project was to allow people in general to get a broader view of what it takes to prepare and preach a sermon versus pastoring God's people. Hicks contends that one must understand that preaching is the vehicle used to communicate the message, but pastoring is the art of leadership, which enables people to get to the places God has purposed for them.[2]

H. Beecher Hicks, Jr. expounds upon the many facets of vision and about capturing a pastor's vision of seeing that vision fulfilled. It discusses both the positive and negative encounters a pastor must face when the only thing that seemingly remains is a *rhema*, the living Word of God[3]

The author elaborates on the many struggles a pastor must transition from and to in order that the substance of what God has for a congregation of believers will eventually evolve into the evidence that had been preordained.

For this project, this book gave the writer a starting point of explaining why it is important for a body of believers to never shrink back from what may initially look impossible; but with a visionary leading the way, the faithful can come to understand that all things are possible to them who believe and are called according to God's purpose. In order to help cast the vision of this (any) ministry project, the preacher must be clear to cast a vision of the devastation that exists in the lives of people. Brokenness is all around people in many communities. While economic indicators point to the country coming out

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[2] H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., *On Jordan's Stormy Banks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 34.

[3] Ibid., 36.

of economic doldrums, the "disinherited," as Howard Thurman called them, include many young people. The sermons preached in this project and the bible studies developed were done such as painting a picture for all to see. The disinherited include tens, if not hundreds of thousands of young people – many of whom are people of color but not all of them – who are in something more than doldrums. Many of these persons live in blighted communities where crack houses, chicken houses, title pawnshops and liquor stores are the main businesses. There are few, if any, libraries and parks. Loitering on corners is a favorite pastime for many youth. The gospel of Jesus has a relevant word for these persons, and the church is supposed to be a welcoming place. Yet, few of these persons find meaning in the church.

From Vision to Healing

One of the words that describe people who are caught up in the web of drug addiction, aimlessness and low self-esteem is "brokenness." Another biblical metaphor is what Jeremiah reminds us of: "a marred vessel."[4] Luke 4:16 speaks of an inaugural sermon of Jesus ministry. The Spirit of the Lord, Jesus preached, anointed him to "bind up broken hearts." Frances MacNutt's book, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing*, is worthy of a review. It seems today that the subject of "healing" is operative in many apostolic, Pentecostal and holiness churches; on the other hand, many mainline Protestant churches are coy about this subject of healing at best; and at its worse, the subject is rarely mentioned. The objective for including this book as a reading source in this project was to expand on the knowledge that Jesus came

[4] Jeremiah 18:4.

to bring healing and deliverance on every level of our being – physical, emotional and spiritual—through the power of the Holy Spirit. Frances MacNutt, the author of this book, expounds upon how mainline denominations have dismissed the belief in healing prayer. This is not only with the enemies of Christianity, but, surprisingly, by Christians themselves.[5]

The author shares how healing prayer has all but disappeared from the historic church. This has resulted in a tragic loss. Jesus' main ministry has remained lost to the traditional centers of Christianity. Many have accepted the traditions of men rather than the teachings of Jesus.[6]

This book gives a clearer understanding of the role the church must play in order that God's Word will work in totality in the lives of those whom R J serves as pastor, and how important it is to the growth and development of mission and community.

Men Whose Hearts God Has Touched

The primary Old Testament biblical foundational text that R J chose to undergird this ministry project is summed up in I Samuel 10:26: "Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched." Anthony Campolo, an author, sociologist and preacher, often speaks about how passion is lacking in the lives of many church people. Dr. Samuel D. Proctor also echoes this note in how there seems to be more passion and community at an athletic outing than in churches. Larry Crabb, in

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[5] Frances MacNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Ada, MI: Chosen/Baker Publishing, 2005), 74.

[6] Ibid., 76-77.

his book *The Silence of Adam: Becoming Men of Courage in a World of Chaos*, expounds on the conversation and theory that challenges men to move beyond the fear of failure that paralyzes them in spiritual matters and relationships. The essential portions of this book ask the reader to listen to our lost dreams, to our fathers, to our brothers, but most important of all, to our God.[7] Larry Crabb and his colleagues give a biblical overview on how God designed men. He uses biblical data, as well as professional experience, to suggest that as men come to understand their masculinity and the biblical reason for their existence, they develop a level of comprehending their richness within society and within their homes.

The author deals thoughtfully and honestly with men's ongoing struggles and exposes the difficulties men have in relationships. Most importantly, this book presents the rich calling men have to reveal God in ways uniquely masculine. It calls men to overcome the paralyzing fear of failure to one of taking risks and action in everyday living.[8] Part of this masculinity involves mentoring younger men and boys while making it acceptable to weep and be honest with themselves.

The Black Church as an Empowerment Center

It is noteworthy of the church to remind itself of the Great Commission and the story of Pentecost. The unifying theme of these two critical events and biblical passages remind the church of the promise of power for the work of ministry (mission). Carlyle Fielding Stewart, Jr., in his book *The Empowerment Church*, speaks to the church as an

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[7] Larry Crabb, Don Hudson and Al Andrews, *The Silence of Adam: Becoming Men of Courage in a World of Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 112.

[8] Ibid., 115-117.

empowerment center. As the title implies, Stewart speaks to the subject of empowerment as taught by Jesus, and then goes on to posit the church using a model of empowerment. He writes, "Jesus' ministry was certainly one of empowerment. A central axiom of Jesus' ministry was that he unequivocally and positively changed lives for the better by calling people who were conflicted and afflicted into a profound realization of their spiritual resources. In addition Jesus made them aware of their God-centered potential, which not only forever changed their lives, but also the communities in which they lived."[9] Stewart speaks to the church engaging in this work of empowerment through "touching, healing, rebuking, exhorting, preaching, teaching, or reaching."[10]

At the center of this work is a chapter entitled "Establishing a Christian Training Academy." "As a means of addressing the need for spiritually trained leaders, every church should institute a back to basics program or spiritual boot camp of Christian training where the fundamentals of Christian spirituality are taught."[11] Stewart goes on to say, "Unfortunately, many churches provide no spiritual training for their laypeople. How can the church truly qualify as a spiritual community when the leaders have not qualified themselves spiritually? Are we letting people off the hook by not requiring them to enroll in a back to basics program or Christian training? How can we develop a viable model of spiritual empowerment when the laity are not empowered spiritually to do the work of God?"[12] After giving a theological basis for this training, Stewart goes on

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[9] Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, *The Empowerment Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 52.

[10] Ibid., 53.

[11] Ibid., 54.

[12] Ibid., 56-57.

to give a detailed description of a Christian Training Academy Curriculum outlining courses, description (curriculum), hours for each course and some possible resources (books) for each class.[13] This same idea of a Christian training template can be viewed in the context of training men at Bethel Church and wider community in models of mentoring young men and women. This training idea can be collaborative with churches in the county of a district, which may lead to certification.

The black church would do well to explore some of the ministry models that are web-based and found on-line. Some of these ministries offer training, certification and even on-line classes. One such ministry is "Straight Ahead Ministries." This ministry offers "Juvenile Justice Ministry Courses." Straight Ahead Ministries is provided in partnership with Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This ministry's course work "provides a comprehensive Christian approach for effective intervention with juvenile offenders that is both biblically and historically grounded, as well as practical ideas for churched, parachurch ministries, chaplaincy programs, and those working within the juvenile justice system and re-entry to the community; with particular attention given to identifying one's own issues of pain, anger, prejudice, and individual leadership style."[14]

Straight Ahead Ministries offers a number of classes for churches that are serious about a ministry to at-risk youth and young adults – many of whom are under the watch

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[13] Ibid., 58.

[14] "Straight Ahead Ministries," accessed May 30, 2014, http://www.straightahead.org/juvenile-justice-ministry-courses.

of the criminal justice system by way of parole or probation. One such training class caught the writer's eyes: "Engaging High Risk Youth: Transformational Approaches."

> This course lays a theological, theoretical and philosophical methodology for working with juvenile offenders in ways that transform character. It is grounded in Scripture, research evidence on resilience and transformational change theory, brain science, and positive youth development, translating the latest research into practical methods for creating transformational environments and interactions that are proven effective for even the most challenging youth. Highly experiential and enlivened by videos and small group practice, the course is designed so that participants will gain specific competencies that can be passed on to other staff and volunteers with the goal of helping them become more effective in working with high risk youth.[15]

Training should be at the forefront of ministry to at-risk persons. Many churches are small in membership numbers and simply let go the notion of training because of the fear of little or no participation. One mentality concerning training of ministers (or lay) must be put to rest: That is that "God will put words in your mouth." The "we are too small" excuse must also be put to rest. Churches can seek to work in collaboration through district associations or ministerial alliances. Many churches do not have problems getting other churches to participate in choir days and anniversaries. Again, collaboration must be an option for this.

The black church is in need of a critical look at how it develops budgets not only for outreach ministries but also training for its members. All of the writer's life, first in the public school systems and times of serving in the Presbyterian Church, R J has been required by the hierarchy to get what can be referred to as continuing education. As a pastor, he has members in a number of vocations, professional and non-professional,

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[15] Ibid.

most of whom will say that I will be out of town next week because I have to go for training for my job. Pastors can no longer be timid about or soft pedal the need for training for persons who give leadership in the life of the church, especially those who are charged with shepherding the youth and young adults.

Collaboration: Partnering with Government and Civic Entities

Many churches, regardless of its ethnic makeup, operate on a shoestring budget. In the midst of the glamor of televangelism – referred to today by many as a media ministry – one must be reminded that the majority of Protestant Churches, as well as those churches that consider themselves as holiness, have pastors who are bi-vocational. Some pastors serve more than one church and still work another full-time job. These churches have some of the youth and young adults. Many churches, in an effort to fund ministries, especially outreach ministries, apply for grants. Some of these grants are from private foundations while others are from federal, state and local governments. The Catholic Church has been receiving millions of dollars for many years to help fund, or fund out right, ministries of the social services nature.

President George W. Bush made faith-based initiatives a top priority of his domestic policy with an office in the White House. Today many churches compete for government funds to carryout social ministries. This is a two-edge sword for some. In many large cities some of the pastors of the larger churches who are savvy and politically connected find themselves recipients of government money. Some of the pastors become beholding to some elected official in terms of publicly supporting some policy or lining up votes for an upcoming election. This focus group is "Prophetic

Preaching and Praxis." Its content and context come out of the prophetic tradition of the eighth-century prophets. One only has to read Amos and Micah to be reminded of priests who take bribes. One also has to understand the nation's constitution of separation of church and state. Notwithstanding these thoughts, church members pay taxes as do non-church members. Before accepting any government funds, the preacher and church leadership must be clear about what strings, if any, come with the check. However, at the end of the day, the one who receives a bowl of soup, a bag of clothing, a prescription filled or assistance with a utility bill is not all that concerned about the source of the income.

Outreach as Part of the Prophetic Tradition of the Black Church

A professor of Christian Ethics, Peter J. Paris, in his book *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, delves into the history of the black church as it relates to dark skinned people in America in their struggle to survive in pursuit of freedom and justice as Christians in America. Paris speaks to the black Christian tradition as a "prophetic principle." Paris points out that the Western Christian tradition is, in part, a staple of the black church. However, the "normative tradition" for blacks is that tradition governed by the principle of non-racism which we call the black Christian tradition is depicted most adequately in the biblical doctrine of the parenthood of God and the kinship of all peoples – which is a version of the traditional sexist expression "the Fatherhood of god and the brotherhood of men.[16]

Paris points out in this book the moral work of the black church Christian

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[16] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 10.

tradition in its quest and push for "education, economics and Civil Rights." Paris points out that "universal illiteracy characterized the masses of blacks as they greeted the Emancipation Act. This challenge was met by blacks starting schools and allying themselves with northern philanthropists and white churches."[17] It is interesting to note that in many cities, starting some forty years ago in the South in particular, began a great exodus from public schools. This is especially so in urban areas. This was on the heels of the federal government-mandated integration. Today, most of the public schools are populated by a black majority in that many whites (most of whom were outstanding church folk) withdrew their children and sent them to private schools. Many even started church-based schools. It is imperative today that the black church, through collaborative efforts, consider starting schools, Charter Schools if need be, to address the plight of a generation of some young people of color who are bumming out in public schools for various reasons.

Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III lends his voice to the prophetic element of the black church. In his book *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry*, Stewart provides a formula for healthy, responsible, and qualitative growth of all churches and other faith communities by combining the experiences of the church and the academy. What stands out for the writer in his context and project is Chapter Six: "Three Principles of Prophetic Evangelism." Here Stewart expounds upon the wedding of proclamation with interpersonal relationships and community outreach and congregational inreach.

> The same principle applies to the prophetic church today. The famous axiom of T. S. Eliot is a useful phrase for prophetic evangelism: 'The whole world is our hospital.' The church therefore engages in the development of programs to meet

[17] Ibid., 68.

> the needs of both the outer and inner community. The way the people in one realm are loved, ministered to, and nurtured will influence persons in the other arena.[18]

Stewart also speaks of topics of empowering women leaders and creating programs for male empowerment. Lastly, he addresses the subject of "Economic Empowerment Through Programs of Self-reliance."[19]

Stewart deals not so much with theory in this book but the practical. Each chapter ends with a check list/questionnaire to assist the pastor and leadership team in pulling together surveys and gathering data thus better enabling the team to be more effective in responding to the needs of those in the church and the community.

The Black Church, the Black Community and Economics

It has been said by many in the black community that: "When America sneezes, the black community gets a cold." This is true especially in the area of economics. Today there is a black (bi-racial) president in the White House, black congress persons, and even black university presidents. Blacks lead many fortune five hundred companies, and many blacks live a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Notwithstanding these advancements in the race, many blacks are still locked in cycles of poverty. To some extent, it is argued that this is generational. While the unemployment rate is going down (currently at 5.9% as of January 2015), many people of color have a higher rate of unemployment. Add to this is that many blacks are ex-felons and are almost unemployable. No sooner than they mark the box on the application, they are all but

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[18] Carlyle Fielding Steward, III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 63.

[19] Ibid.

disqualified. Then there are others who do not have high school diplomas. In the discussion on raising the minimum wages, one congressman said "the minimum wage should not be raised because low pay was necessary for minorities and other unskilled workers who were not worth more than $7.00 an hour."[20] When the writer was teaching in Detroit, minimum wage jobs at fast-food places and elsewhere were for students. Today, many adults have these jobs in what seems like a permanent place of employment. Economics has to play a part in the plight of the hard-to-employ and the un-employable.

Jawanza Kunjufu, in his book *Black Economics: Solutions for Economic and Community Empowerment,* speaks to black earning power, where blacks spend their money and other pertinent matters. The objective for including this book as a reading source in this project was to gain a deeper understanding of economic conditions in the black community and explore why African Americans earn only 61% of white American income, why many African Americans prefer to maintain a good job rather than own and operate their own businesses, and why African American consumers only spend 3% of their $600 billion in African American businesses.[21]

Kunjufu expounds on the history of black economics by going back to the motherland, Africa, where land was always recognized as belonging to the community. Individuals within this society had a right to use the land because otherwise he could not earn his living. He explains that one cannot have the right to life without also having the

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[20] Daily Kos, "GOP lawmaker: Minimum wage is for teenagers and minorities," accessed January 22, 2015, http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/01/22/1359571/-GOP-lawmaker-Minimum-wage-is-for-teenagers-and-minorities.

[21] Jawanza Kunjufu, *Black Economics: Solutions for Economic and Community Empowerment,* 2nd ed. (Sauk, IL: African American Images, 2002), 56.

right to some means of maintaining life. Africans' right to land was simply the right to use it; he had no other right to it nor did it occur to him to try to claim one.[22]

The author identifies seven objectives to achieve in this book. They include objectives such as increasing black businesses in the African American community, having some of the best African American minds involved in starting these businesses, or needing responsible business owners who will be responsive to the needs of the masses or studying successful economic ventures historically and presently in our community.[23]

This book was an eye opener from the standpoint of understanding why African Americans do not own businesses and seemingly do not seek the economic know-how to own them. Cultures differ in ways that may not always appear to the natural eye; however, understanding economics can be fundamentally used to change and extend family capital.[24]

In the early development of former slaves in this country, attention was given to starting schools, civic clubs, orphanages and stores all of which catered almost exclusively to black people. In so doing a dollar would go from one black business to another several times. This is not meant to imply that blacks should not patronize non-black businesses and vendors. Rather, it speaks of a consciousness to create jobs and help people develop marketable skills in the black community. Many people in other ethnic communities, especially Asians, do this today in America. This leads to the

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[22] Ibid., 57.

[23] Ibid., 65.

[24] Ibid.

discussion in what roles the church can and should play today in black economic development.

Positive Images

In his book *Developing Positive Self-Images & Discipline in Black Children,* Jawanza Kunjufu speaks of viewing black children in the context of all the factors that can potentially affect their future. These factors are fraught with difficulties. The author believes in a holistic approach to solve most problems and particularly positive images and self-discipline in black children. Kunjufu believes that African-American children need to be given a frame of references that is consistent with their culture. In other words, they should be given a frame of reference that allows them to analyze images, literature, and history from an African persuasion. With parents being their first and primary teacher, children should be encouraged to maintain their curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. The author believes this can be achieved with a curriculum that mandates thinking skills.[25] This book give fundamental strategies that will help create a learning environment enabling African-American children, especially boys, the kind of help that assists in turning an otherwise hopeless situation into one that helps to produce self-esteem or a positive self-knowledge by fostering an awareness of one's historical origins. This knowledge gives the frame of reference stated earlier.[26] For R J's project, this book gives insight into meeting the needs of elevating African-American children

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[25] Jawanza Kunjufu, *Developing Positive Self-Images & Discipline in Black Children* (Saulk, IL: African American Images, 1984), 30.

[26] Ibid., 98.

into a thriving environment by looking at accomplishments made through positive self-imaging and discipline.

A Consciousness of Being Black in America

It is painful to say, but true nonetheless, that there is a crisis of the health and welfare of young black males in America. Some people believe that part of this is by design. Haki Madhubuti has some poignant conversation about this subject in his book *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The African American Family in Transition*. In this book he reveals a needed truth in the United States not based on false histories, false assumptions, false arguments or false realities. In addition, the author states there are misconceptions regarding cultural influence and the way people view themselves and the extent to which they rise up out of any situation and decide their own course of action.[27] He further expounds on how to build healthy, thriving black families and communities and also takes aim at some of the critical issues facing the African American family. Madhubuti offers useful, pointed, and practical solutions for overcoming these obstacles and challenges.

The author expounds on issues that surround black men in today's society. While the author looks at the tone of why black men do what they do, he raises issues that are stereotypical to most black men today. Issues that include essays addressing were corners made for black men to stand on. In this essay, the author deals with the larger question as to what does a people do when the social, political, and economic conditions under which they live are not only designed to limit their intellectual and

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[27] Haki Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The African Family in Transition* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1990), 75.

material development, but are structured ultimately to kill them.[28] The book gave this writer confirmation of what he has already witnessed and understood on the plight of black men in America. This has been witnessed in the church, community, and school system where R J has been involved.

For R J's project, this book gave him deeper insight as to the work that remains undone and how those who have been inspired to help reduce the plight of black men in America must continue to forge ahead. Also, it addressed how the church and community must work to assiduously turn this situation around for African American men and how the black family must begin with what black men do as heads of their households.

Men of Courage

This writer believes that, as Larry Crabb spoke to earlier in this chapter, men of faith must move beyond fear and societal definitions of masculinity and embrace young men in particular who stand in need of counselling and mentoring. The bible is full of examples of men of faith mentoring others in the faith. From Moses to Jethro, from Eli to Samuel, from Elijah to Elisha from Paul to Timothy, one sees example after example. Men of faith already have examples and blue prints of how to engage one another in mentoring. Men must also be well aware that the church setting may be the last place where such initial contact can or may occur. Sometimes the setting may be in a community setting such as a game, an outing or field trip. There is an old Native

[28] Ibid., 89.

American proverb that says, "The people don't care what you know until they know that you care." One thing everyone of faith knows about Jesus: he cares.

Creating models of ministries to address people at-risk is a daunting task. The work is so great that one hardly knows where to begin. For those who are willing to do some work in research, study and prayer, one can certainly put into place, what may seem so insignificant, a program, project or ministry that can touch, enrich and direct at least one. One must be reminded that the kingdom of heaven coming involves even small things and tiny steps.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Theoretical Foundations of the Focus Group: Prophetic Preaching and Praxis

At the center of the work of the church is evangelism. To this end an unwritten aspect of each church's mission statement is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Another central aspect of the church is that of mission. Many people refer to the work of evangelism as mission. When the writer speaks of mission here, he speaks of the work of the church in outreach and kingdom building.

The principle theme of the teaching of Jesus was "the Kingdom of God." By definition the Kingdom of God speaks to the reign of God in one's life. One aspect of this kingdom is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To say that Jesus is Lord is to give one's life to him in the realm of service. Life in the kingdom involves not only the way one responds to God but also the way one responds to one another. The main tenet of the Old Testament is the Decalogue, also known as the Ten Commandments. Its counterpart in the New Testament, if one can be found, is the Sermon on the Mount. In both of these blocks of teachings behavior toward neighbor and also stranger is at the forefront. In the Parable of the Last Judgment found in the gospel of Matthew (chapter 25), Jesus speaks to how the subject of reward in the afterlife will be determined by how people of faith treated others whom he referred to as "the least of these." So the care for others, not just those in one's circle, is paramount to Christian faithfulness and discipleship.

In response to this faithfulness many churches put forth efforts to engage others in their community under the auspices of local mission or outreach. Some churches are located in upscale suburbs where the residents have high level of incomes. The public schools, funded largely by property taxes, are some of the finest in the state. Other churches are located in what has been called "the hood" or lower development areas. The landscape is punctuated with urban blight. Many houses in these areas pale in comparison to other neighborhoods. Also, the amenities of other neighborhoods such as libraries, eateries, parks, and cultural centers are noticeably and largely absent in some of the neighborhoods where some of the churches are located. What then is the church response to blighted communities?

The focus group that R J is a part of is "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis." Much of prophetic preaching is accompanied by bringing the word of God to bear on the lives of people of faith when it comes to faithfulness and purity of worship. This prophetic preaching and teaching also deals with one's value systems, particularly in how people of faith treat others in general and specifically those in need. The eighth century prophets were quick to lash out at those in the ruling classes, civil and religious, for mistreatment of the poor. These prophets also had a strong word for those who were indifferent to the plight of those who were hurting. The people were reminded by Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah that God had called the people of the covenant into community. Amos in particular had a harsh word for those who enjoyed the fruits of the lands and the goods off of the toils of others' backs. He spoke a word of woe to them accusing them of "being at-ease in Zion" [Amos 6:1].

Today in many communities, large and small, churches are located in areas that are blighted with all that it entails. In these communities are boarded-up houses, beer gardens, and streets corners and what passes as a park, or should I say playground, where drug sales take place. Churches are also located on many of these corners. Some of these churches have little or no outreach to these communities. Many of these churches are noted more for anniversaries and choir days than tutorial programs and food pantries.

Bethel Missionary Baptist Church located in Alcoa, Tennessee, is the context where R J serves as senior pastor. The communities and neighborhoods throughout Alcoa is not unlike many other communities where the need is so great. In the Alcoa community many African American youth in middle and high schools are failing and dropping out at an alarming high level. Drug usage and addiction is high. Self-esteem is low and employment opportunities are out of reach for many because of the lack of education, drug abuse and felony convictions. R J can preach and teach about the prophetic word of God in sermons and bible study. Yet, the word of God calls for action. This is where the "praxis," also known as practice, comes into view. Responding to this context in ministry, R J proposes as a project to organize a men's mentoring group known as Men In Christ (MIC) to address the four areas stated above. Though this ministry will be based at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, it will be a county-wide effort involving people from other churches and the communities and reaching other small municipalities in Blount County. The composition of this group will be men; however, opportunities for women to participate in its goals will be offered. Bethel Church will be the primary site where activities and ministries take places; however, other settings will be used such as other churches, libraries, schools and community centers.

Biblical Foundation

The project that R J proposes to implement for this doctoral program is "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee." The premise in this endeavor is that too many youth and young adults find themselves in a web of temptation when it comes to drug abuse, pre-marital sex, illegal activities and a lifestyle of aimlessness. Added to this is the reality that many of these youths live in homes where they see such activity on display from day to day. This is compounded by another reality where many households do not have parents that instill strong values to their children while some do. Many of the parents also have deficits in education and are unable to help their children with school work. Many of these communities once had scouting and boys and girls clubs and outreach organizations. Today, many of these groups, and others similar to them, are absent. The church is good at telling people – youth in particular – to be encouraged and hold on. Many times, catchy slogans are spouted such as: "Just say no." Sometimes, just saying no is not enough. The church needs to give people something to which they can say "yes."

Therefore, R J is led by the spirit to organize a Men In Christ (MIC) organization to address some of these ills and to offer youth and young adults a venue of events and activities: things to which they can say yes. The primary Old Testament text is I Samuel 10:26, and the primary New Testament text is Luke 5:17-26. These two biblical texts speak volumes on the subject of how the believers in Christ can meet challenges, organize, pool their resources and address many of the ills spelled out in this narrative. Although the Old Testament text above only covers one verse, the reader must be reminded that even that one verse has to be expounded upon in the larger context of a

specific unit in which it resides but also from the context of the social-political setting of time and events.

Old Testament Text and Present Reality

The book of Samuel, from which this primary Old Testament text comes, gives much historical detail to the life of the twelve confederated tribes in how they became a nation. The tenth chapter of the I Samuel speaks to the subject of how the tribes grew tired of their present system of governance. They observed from their neighbors that they had a system of governance led by a king. Wanting to be more like their neighbors, the tribes cried out to the prophet-priest on the scene, Samuel, and demanded that he give them a king. In the collective narratives on this subject Samuel shared with them the reasons that they should not have a king (I Samuel 8:10-22). The people rejected his response. God instructed Samuel to give them a king. From this narrative Saul was chosen, a coronation was held and Saul returned home. The text records it:

> Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship; and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people back to their homes. Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose heart God had touched (I Sam 10:25-26).[1]

As the new nation of Israel is launched the text speaks of people accompanying Saul as men whose hearts God had touched. Keeping with the theme of this proposed project, a parallel will be drawn between those who accompanied Saul in building the nation and the group Men In Christ (MIC) at Bethel Church. The character and work of the men in this text accompanying Saul and those in the group MIC will be examined in the context of the work of kingdom building in a ministry of outreach to youth and young adults.

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[1] I Samuel 10:25-26.

In this development and implementation of a king movement, the question arises, "Who can save us?" (I Sam 10:27). To be more precise, some worthless fellows, according to the text, raised this question in regards to Saul becoming king of Israel. The thought in Israel's mind was "who could save us?" "For Israel, it was kingship in general and Saul in particular. For us it may be denominational structures and leaders … or it may be secular institutions of governance and the officeholders or civil servants who work in them. Israel's story once again suggest that the structures and the persons alone cannot save."[2]

The Contextual Setting

The scene in which the kingship unfolds is one of irony. The people were called by Samuel to Mizpah. It is here that the public acclamation is made that Saul is designated as king.

> Thus the Mizpah story seems to reflect the deep ambiguity in Israel over kingship. In fact, the story ends with references to supporters and detractors of Saul. The public beginnings of kingship in Israel were unsettled and disturbing. How can the people's rejection of God still result in Saul as God's chosen one?[3]

It must not be lost upon the reader "that Israel had 'rejected your God 'who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses.' Israel had done this by asking for a king. This charge is emphasized by characterizing Israel's response to the Lord as an emphatic 'No!'"[4] Notwithstanding this rejection Samuel calls for an assembly of the people where

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[2] Bruce C. Birch, "Commentary: I Samuel 10:17-27a," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 2, Numbers – II Samuel, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1050.

[3] Ibid., 1046.

[4] Ibid., 1047.

a cultic ceremony takes place and Saul is chosen as king. God is not a bystander in this process but active. It is the prophet-priest Samuel acting on God's directives. In his leadership capacity, "Samuel accomplished three things: he (1) revealed that Saul was God's choice to be Israel's first king, (2) laid out for Saul a series of confirmatory signs, and then (3) intimated to Saul the proper relationship that was to exist between king and prophet in Israel."[5] Israel's king would be unlike the kings of the Gentiles. He would serve as an agent of Yahweh and govern from a book.

Saul Goes in Hiding

Was it a curious choice of God to choose Saul as the first king of Israel? Saul, the son of Kish, was chosen – taken by lot – to be king.

> So they inquired again of the LORD, 'Did the man come here?' and the LORD said, 'See, he has hidden himself among the baggage.' I Sam 10:22

What an awkward way for the nation to begin. The king designee is nowhere to be found. In fact, he is in hiding. It is speculated that Saul did not think that he was up to the task and so he went in hiding. One commentator posits, "Saul could neither have wished to avoid accepting the monarchy, nor have imagined that the lot would not fall upon him if he hid himself. For he knew that God had chosen him; and Samuel had anointed him already. He did it therefore simply from humility and modesty. In order that he might not appear to have either the hope or desire for anything of the kind, he preferred to be absent when the lots were cast."[6] Other biblical scholars disagree with

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[5] R. D. Bergen. Vol. 7:1, 2 Samuel. *The New American Commentary* (126-134). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996. Logos Bible Software.

[6] C. F. Keil & F. Delizxch, Vol. 2: Commentary on the Old Testament (435-437). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996. Logos Bible Software.

this notion. One scholar noted, "Saul's vacancy at his own coronation suitably foreshadows a reign that would vacate responsibilities associated with the exercise of godly rule and perhaps suggest the lack of wisdom of those who preferred such a king to Yahweh. At the same time, divine assistance in the search for Saul reinforced the conclusion that Saul was indeed the Lord's answer to Israel's demand for a king 'like the other nations.'"[7] Yet, another commentator gives his spin on Saul hiding among the baggage.

> Most of us today are inclined to hide in the baggage. We are reluctant to think that we might be the very one through whom God's salvation might work. Our fear frequently arises because we only gauge our own human resources and fail to trust in what God might work through us and our limited gifts. The life of the church is full of baggage-searching efforts, insisting that with God's grace this one or that one might really give the leadership needed. The trick is to be certain that we are prayerfully attuned to God's choices and not our own. God's choosing may lead, as with Saul, to some less obvious nominees through whom God's saving grace might work.[8]

There seems to be no consensus in scholarship as to why Saul was in hiding. Nonetheless, he was found, the coronation ended and he left for home. "Since no capital city had yet been established for an Israelite monarch, Saul's hometown became the de facto first capital of Israel."[9]

There Went With Him Men of Valor

What are we to make of these men who went with Saul to launch the nation? This crowd of men, according to one writer, gave Saul "a royal escort, and show their

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[7] Bergem. 126-134.

[8] Bruce C. Birch, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 1050.

[9] Bergen, 126-134.

readiness to serve him. This does not signify a large military force, but a crowd of brave men, who formed Saul's escort of honour."[10] Verses 26 and 27 note that when Saul was sent away as king, he was accompanied by supporters who were describe as "warriors" in the NRSV or "valiant men" in the NIV. "The word so translated can indicate strength or prowess in battle, but can also signify wealth and influence. Since economic wealth and political influence were often accompanied and protected by military power in Israel's world, it is easy to see how this work includes all these nuances."[11] The expression "men of valor," writes a commentator, "translates a single Hebrew word whose basic meaning is 'power' or 'strength.' It is often used with the specific meaning 'the army.' TEV follows the Septuagint in reading 'powerful men' instead of 'the army.' NRSV says 'warriors,' and REB, following the Septuagint, says 'fighting men.' The meaning is basically the same, whether one follows the MT or the Septuagint."[12]

Much attention has been focused on the expression "men of valor." A word study of this expression "warrior" sheds light on both Israel's past and possibly its future. "The conception of the divine warrior in Israel's premonarchic poetry is preserved in its fundamental features in literature which comes from the royal court and temple in Jerusalem during Israel's monarchy."[13] These soldiers were more than just a military entourage; rather, they were carrying forth divine work as ordered by God. "The

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[10] Keil, 435.

[11] Ibid., 1048-1049.

[12] R. L Omanson, & J. Ellington, J. A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel. UBS Handbook Series (217-222). New York: United Bible Societies, 2001.

[13] Theodore Hiebert, "Divine Warrior," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 6, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 878.

historian's particular treatment of the divine warrior focuses on God's declaration and leadership of tribal warfare as a united conquest of the entire land."[14] Going forward with Saul, these men had such a divine orientation in its consciousness. Yet, other scholars posit a different take on this passage. "Some of Israel's warriors (veterans of the recent campaign against the Philistines?) were convinced that Saul was what Israel needed, and so joined him to form a militia."[15]

Men's Heart Touched by God

What is meant by "hearts touched by God" and what significance does it have for people of faith? Accompanying Saul on his way home to launch a nation-building event were men characterized by the affair of their hearts. What is one to make of the word heart in religious thought and how it is used in this passage? "The heart pertains to human conduct and action. The Shema (Deut 6:4-5) distinguishes three forms in which Israel is supposed to love God: with Soul (nefesh), with all its heart (lev). And with all its power (me'odh)."[16] The Greek *kardia* (heart) figuratively speaks of the heart as "the seat of the emotions and the source of spiritual life in general."[17] The Old Testament uses *leb* for "heart."

> In the metaphorical sense *leb* is the seat of man's spiritual and intellectual life, the inner nature of man. Here the close connection between spiritual and intellectual

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Quickverse, *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, based on the classic commentary Jamaieson, Fausset and Brown, J. D. Douglas Editor, I Samuel 10:26. Wheaton, Il: Tyndale House Publisher.

[16] C. Mark McCormick, "The Heart," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, D – H, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed. (Nashville: TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 764.

[17] T. Sorg, "Heart," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, Colin Brown ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1967, 1969, 1971), 180.

> processes and the functional reactions of the heart's activity is particularly clearly seen.[18]

This word, heart, in its usage in the bible, is the focus of human's will and thought.

> Since the idea of responsibility is particularly related to the heart, that which comes out of the heart is quite distinctively the property of the whole inner man, and therefore make him, as a consciously acting ego, responsible for it. Since, in the OT, the only corrective to this responsibility of man is to be found in Yahweh, the heart is also the organ through which man, either as godly or as disobedient, meets God's word and acts.[19]

Yet another scholar puts a different perspective on these men whose hearts God had touched.

> Some language may require a separate sentence for this relative clause. There may also be a question as to the meaning of the clause. Does it mean that God had inspired them to accompany Saul to his home? Or is it a more general statement about God's having stirred them emotionally by the consecration of their new king? Most English versions leave the meaning rather vague, but in those languages that are forced to choose, perhaps it will be best to indicate that these men were inspired by God to accompany Saul, no doubt to protect him and to serve him.[20]

These men's hearts were stirred, touched and reached by God in a meaningful way as they moved out into what would be an epoch period in the life of the people of the covenant. They moved out with the understanding that their task would include serving Saul, defending the nation and building the community of faith. They moved out having been touched by God.

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[18] Ibid., 181.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Omanson, 217-222.

The word touched (these hearts) is a verb that is used "figuratively in the sense of emotionally involvement."[21] Taken from the Hebrew verb stem *naga*, the word touch means "had reached, draw near, or "joined."[22] Following this line of thinking they were men accompanying Saul to build the nation of Israel whose hearts God had "reached" (touched) in a meaningful and significant way. It can be argued also that God had drawn near these men and joined their hearts with a singleness of purpose. One writer noted, "God's action in these men's lives demonstrates that the Lord was supplying his anointed with the vital resources needed to fulfill his responsibilities."[23]

The Church Launching Ministries in Its Neighborhoods

This sending forth passage of Saul as king accompanied by men whose hearts that God had touched can speak volume to pastors and church leaders alike. Though Saul had his critics and detractors, he also had strong, committed men going alongside him to do the work of establishing a nation. The communities in which churches are located can be looked upon, in one sense, as a microcosm of the kingdom of God. In order for many of these communities to be strong, the church needs pastors and men of faith who are committed, dedicated and spirit filled. This is not to say that there should not be involvement of women though. There is a recognition of today's church leadership where many of the men are absent. In places where a substantial number of men are found, an argument can be made that many of them, like Saul, are hiding behind the

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[21] James Strong and W. E. Vines, *The New Strong's Concise Concordance & Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible: Two Bible Reference Classics In One Handy Volume* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1997, 1999), 383.

[22] Ibid.

[23] R. D. Bergem, 126-134.

baggage. The preacher must see himself as a prophet-priest who casts the vision of what God is calling the church to do in its neighborhoods and the nation. Convocations and assemblies must be called to highlight the plight and the needy. The preacher must see himself and herself as moving out, launching out into the deep to serve. God's word said that it would not go out and come back void.

These men, whose hearts God has touched, can make a tremendous difference in the lives of people of faith and those who do not know of the love of God. These men, filled with the spirit, can serve as a band or army in service. Just as the translations of this text speaks of fighting men, these courageous men will, as many have done through the years and many are presently doing, can and must fight. Their forbearers suffered so much and many lost their lives, yet they fought for human dignity under the banner of God's righteousness. So must men of faith today. Courageous, spirit-filled men today must fight to reclaim many who are lost, live in despair and face dread. Howard Thurman liken many of these people as those "who live with their backs up against the walls." Many of the church's hymns of faith speak to the faithful as an army and the work of the Lord as a fight. One such familiar hymn reads:

> We are soldiers in the army,
> We have to fight, although we have to cry.
> We have to hold high the blood stain banner,
> We have to hold it up until we die.[24]

This fighting is not marked by physically assaulting persons or extracting pain from them; rather, it is marked by a conscientious, deliberate effort to overcome principalities as the New Testament spells out. This fighting involves reaching out to the least, last and

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[24] Hymnlyrics.org, "We are Soldiers," anonymous author, public domain, accessed May 30, 2014, http://www.hymnlyrics.org/requests/we_are_soldiers.php.

lost. It involves one's spiritual and emotional energy. It involves being a part of the change-making process, by and through the aid of the Holy Spirit, in the lives of people. When such energy of the Spirit is invested in the lives of people, transformation will and does happen.

New Testament Text

Again, the Men In Christ proposed organization will have as its mission outreach to the community, a ministry to youth and young adults who are at-risk. The writer has chosen as a primary text for this New Testament focus Luke 5:17-26.

> 17One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting
> near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from
> Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.[a] 18Just then some
> men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in
> and lay him before Jesus; 19but finding no way to bring him in because of the
> crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles
> into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. 20When he saw their faith, he
> said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." 21Then the scribes and the Pharisees
> began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive
> sins but God alone?" 22When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered
> them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 23Which is easier, to say,
> 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? 24But so that you
> may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to
> the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to
> your home." 25Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying
> on, and went to his home, glorifying God. 26Amazement seized all of them, and
> they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things
> today."

Jesus' fame had spread throughout the land and people from far and near had come to see him. Some came perhaps out of curiosity while others came to hear his teaching. Among the group that came were Pharisees, a religious sect that held beliefs on the strictest interpretation of the law and ceremonial purity. Yet, others in attendance were scribes who had become professional teachers of the law. Some came to trip Jesus up and to

present him in an unfavorable light while others came to be healed of sickness and disease. This latter situation is indeed the case in this text. Those being cited specifically in this group were not looking for healing for themselves; rather, they brought someone who was in need of healing. Though this examination covers the entire passage cited above, emphasis is place on verse eighteen:

> Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus (Luke 5:13).

The Context and Setting of the Passage

There is uncertainty regarding the exact geographical location where this event took place or the names of the persons who are the residents of the house where Jesus was. The text tells us only that he was in a house teaching. The house was packed so that no one else could enter. On the outside was a throng unable to get in. Among them was a group of men carrying a paralyzed person on a mat. Unable to get in through the door, this group climbed up on top of the house, remove tiles and lowered the sick man in front of Jesus. In amazement, or was it, Jesus spoke to the man telling him that his sins were forgiven. The two primary themes that stand our here are of forgiveness and healing. Forgiveness is defined as "an act of God's grace to forget forever and not hold people of faith accountable for sins they confess; to a lesser degree the gracious human act of not holding wrong acts against a person."[25] Healing is the act that restores life and vitality from disease and sickness. It was because of the paralyzed man's condition that he was brought to Jesus.

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[25] Holman's Bible Dictionary, "forgiveness," Quickverse, 8.0. Bible Software.

> We must remember that sin and suffering were in Palestine inextricably connected. It was implicitly believed that if a man was suffering he had sinned. And therefore the sufferer very often had an even morbid sense of sin. That is why Jesus began by telling the man that his sins were forgiven. Without that the man would never believe that he could be cured.[26]

This healing was not a cause for celebration, at least for some in attendance. To be specific, The Pharisees and scribes took issue with Jesus' proclamation that the "man's sins were forgiven." An exchange took place between Jesus and his critics in this setting. These critics believed that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus turned the question on them asking which is easier: to forgive sins or heal. He then healed the sick man bidding him to take up his mat and go.

> This shows how in debate the scribes and Pharisees were completely routed. They objected to Jesus claiming to extend forgiveness to the man. But on their own arguments and assumptions the man was ill because he had sinned; and he was cured that was proof that his sins were forgiven. The complaint of the Pharisees recoiled on them and left them speechless.[27]

How striking is this exchange between Jesus and his critics. "The general resistance Jesus met in Nazareth now becomes much more focused, and a specific charge is considered: blasphemy."[28] How marvelous is the mercy extended to the paralyzed man in his healing. This healing story "also weaves together even more closely than earlier scenes the twin themes of the power of Jesus' words and his power to heal. For the first time also faith and forgiveness of sins are introduced."[29] These two scenarios – the debate and healing – are not the only things that stood out in this narrative.

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[26] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 62.

[27] Ibid.

[28] R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Volume IX, Luke – John, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 122.

[29] Ibid.

Men: Baring and Caring One Another's Burdens

The passage that stands out, in the context of this project Men In Christ (MIC) in this narrative story, is that of the men who brought the infirmed man to Jesus. There is a synoptic story in Mark's gospel about this event (Mark 2:1-12). Luke's Gospel says some men came carrying the paralyzed man while Mark says in verse three that there were four men.

What were these men up against? They carried the infirmed man. How far and long we do not know. They were thwarted by first getting through the crowd that was a barrier and unable to get to Jesus by going through the front door. They could have easily turned around conceding that they tried. However, they were not to be deterred. They worked out a plan. Some climbed up on the roof while the others hoisted the man to them. They removed the tiles on the roof and gently let the man down to the floor in front of Jesus. "In an act of persistence and determination that will be interpreted as faith, the men go up on the housetop and lower the paralyzed man down through the roof."[30] Who were these men who brought the infirmed to Jesus? Jesus sees them as men of faith. "In this scene, faith, healing and forgiveness are closely related. A popular theological view interpreted physical afflictions as punishment for sin, but the relation between the two is ambiguous in this scene. Jesus does not treat sin as the cause of the man's affliction. Rather, he uses the healing to confirm this authority to forgive sin."[31]

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[30] Ibid., 123.

[31] Ibid.

This is a story that is fascinating and has multiple themes, some of which are coupled. As mentioned earlier in this writing, two of the themes are coupled: healing and forgiveness. Another theme present is faith. It is also tied to the belief in the power of God (through Jesus) to heal. One writer states, "Faith is found not in the assembly of scribes and Pharisees from all the surrounding region, but in four unnamed neighbors.[32] Faith is to be found in this story though. Faith is present "not in affirming a particular tradition's theological creed but in the conviction that Jesus is able to mediate God's power. Because of the determination of friends, a man who could not come to Jesus on his own is forgiven and healed."[33]

Who were these unnamed men? We do not know. We do know, however, what they did and what led them to do so. Taking this paralyzed man to Jesus involved belief (faith) on their own part. These men had seen or heard – maybe both – of Jesus and his power to heal. This belief led them to take on this task. Taking this man to Jesus involved labor and muscle. They place this man on a pallet and carried him some distance; exactly how far we do not know. Taking this man to Jesus involved going through barriers and overcoming obstacles. When they reached the house where Jesus was, they were unable to get inside because of the crowd. So they hoisted him up on top of the house, remove tiles and lowered him to Jesus feet. How awesome is this story! These men of faith do not have their names recorded in the gospel narratives. What they did though serves as an example of faithfulness. It also speaks volumes to the

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[32] Ibid., 125.

[33] Ibid.

possibilities of what others can do when they unite in faith in an effort to bring to Jesus that which is out of order or in need of attention.

All three of the synoptic gospels record this story.

> Matthew 9:1-8 also has a synoptic parallel to this healing of the paralyzed man. 'Each of the Gospels points to a different meaning in the conclusion to the story. In Matthew the crowed glorify God for giving 'such authority to human beings' (9:8). In Mark the response seems to magnify the healing: We have never seen anything like this!' (2:12). Luke uses a term that occurs nowhere else in the NT: 'We have seen strange things today.'[34]

Though much attention has been given to the themes of forgiveness, healing and faith, the theme of glorifying God must not be lost in this story. In the Westminster Catechism, the first question raised is "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."[35] God is indeed to be glorified for God's many might acts.

Conclusion

Again, who were these men who carried the infirmed man to Jesus? Again, we do not know. We do know that they were men who had faith and acted upon it. In our many church communities are men who have faith. These passages hold great hope for them to emulate. In the Bethel Church and Blount County community are such men. They too have great capacities for outreach ministry when they come together in faith, organize themselves and move out into the community. Organized under the rubric of MIC, authorized by the word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, these men can reach many who are ill: both literally and figuratively. In this community is a great sickness of

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Westminster Shorten Catechism, accessed June 4, 2013, http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html.

drug usage and selling, theft (much of which goes to support drug habits), a high degree of high school drop-outs, teen pregnancy, high levels of unemployment along with a general malaise and sense of aimlessness among youth and young adults. When these men mobilize and move out into the community, they can, through faith, help put into place organizations, institutes and centers where those who are addicted to drugs can see that addiction can be treated. Those who struggle with learning and are beyond the traditional age of public education can be met with opportunities for learning that will assist them in getting GEDs. Relationships can be developed with employers who may take a chance on hiring felons who are enrolled in GED programs and who are drug free and in programs of uplift. People who are marginal in their faith or who are without faith will be touched and encouraged by people of faith that they too want to take a closer look at Jesus. So by faith, people will slowly come in the knowledge and saving grace of Jesus and have their lives transformed.

The MIC group will be a mission group. They can carry forth ministry both as men whose hearts God had touch (with Saul) and those men of faith who carried the infirmed man to Jesus. Collectively, mission involves not only outreach and social uplift but also witnessing, teaching, preaching and healing. The MIC efforts will not be directed solely to individuals but also to systems that are unfair, indifferent or unjust. These MIC are transformers who will work to bring people to newness of life and abundant life. And when people are saved, healed, uplifted and renewed, believers can share in the praise report: "We have seen great things today." When the sinful, repents and returns to God, Luke 15 reminds that the angels in heaven also rejoice.

Historical Foundation

The project that the writer proposes to implement for this doctoral program is "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee." The premise in this endeavor is that too many youth and young adults find themselves in a web of temptation when it comes to drug abuse, pre-marital sex, illegal activities and a lifestyle of aimlessness. To address this issue a men's group is being organized with the name Men In Christ (MIC). Through prayer, bible study and faith formation, this group will witness to this demographic sector of Blount County in ministries of outreach. This section of the thesis deals with the historical record of how the Judeo-Christian community engaged in outreach to its community. It will then examine outreach in the Apostolic Age as well as church outreach in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It will close with tracing some aspects of the black church experience in America.

The Hebrew Faith Outreach Measures

The Hebrew Bible has practically nothing to say about social services agencies and faith outreach centers that had specific ministries to people who were marginalized or at risk in its day. It does, however, say much about the treatment of slaves, strangers and neighbors. Viewing these categories gives the reader a glimpse into the faith psyche of the Israelites. Exodus 21:1-22 states the ordinances of how Hebrews were to treat slaves. Slavery existed throughout the biblical world including Palestine and Egypt. The ethical treatment of slaves as pointed out by Jewish law showed an element of decency, if such a word can be used in the same sentence with slavery, as compared to Israel's neighbors

and foes. Verse two speaks to this: "When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt." The book of Deuteronomy further underscores this point of decency.

> And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today (Dt 15:12-15).

Regardless of how one feels about the institution of slavery, clearly this faith responsibility of the slave owner to the slave has a measure of grace to it. Leviticus speaks a word about how one in faith is to respond to foreigners.

> When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who reside with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Lev 19:33-34).

The Mosaic Law has much to say about the religious consciousness of God as it relates to ethical treatment of people. Again, there were no social service agencies to address the throes and ills of society of that day. It was, then, incumbent upon people of faith to respond in a certain way to their neighbor. This is seen in the story of Cain and Abel. One of the most memorable questions of the faith arose out of their drama when Cain asked of the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper" (Gen 4:9).

The faith response of the people of the covenant not only addressed slaves and foreigners but also neighbors. Leviticus 25, more so than any other Old Testament passage, addresses the subject of humane treatment to the poor and needy. In this passage The LORD speaks to Moses giving him instructions on how the people of faith

are to live when they reached the land that is promised. Most of these statutes deal with land, possessions, harvest, jubilee and treatment of the poor. One passage reads,

> If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit (Lev 25:35-37).

Here one can clearly see that compassion was embedded in the covenant's statutes and ordinances for strangers, foreigners and slaves along with neighbors and friends. Many of the people of that day who lived in those communities had issues of poverty, not belonging and hardship. The faith teachings of the Israelites spoke to the people about appropriate responses to these situations.

The Gospel and New Testament Faith Outreach

The gospel has much to say also about ethical treatment of people in need. Jesus taught about the role of compassion in faith in word and demonstrated it in deed. His ministry was one of compassion from the healing of the blind and infirmed, feeding the multitude, casting out demons and insistence on forgiveness. At the center of his teaching is how life is to be lived in the Kingdom of God. This spoke of a faith/spiritual citizenship that believers had in God's economy and law. Jesus began all of his parables with the introduction "the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) is like…." Before one can get out of the first chapter of Mark, one sees Jesus engaged in healing. The Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters five through seven, speaks of ethical behavior not only toward God but also toward others. The Parable of the Last Judgment found in Matthew 25:31-46 speaks to people of faith assisting in meeting the needs of the hungry,

thirsty, sick, naked, prisoner, and stranger. Are not the people in many communities – both integrated and segregated, both black, white, Latino or otherwise -- living with their backs up against the walls are not only in poverty but in a life of drugs, aimlessness and even deviance? Are they not objects of God's love and candidates to the word of God that saves, liberates and heals? The Parable of the Last Judgment speaks some of the harshest language to people found in the gospel. Jesus called people who did nothing for others goats and said that God was not pleased with this. What is striking about these condemning words is that this group of persons spelled out in the parable did nothing wrong -- or so it seem. They did not steal from anyone. They did not inflict bodily harm on anyone. They did not undermine anyone. As a matter a fact, a check-off list with their actions on the Ten Commandments would find them in good standing. Jesus helps us to understand that what was wrong (with their inaction) was the fact that they did not help those in need and in not doing so they failed miserably in faith.

As one leaps frog from the gospel to the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles, one sees many other acts of graciousness that are taught and expressed as a faithful lifestyle for the believing community. Acts 2:42 speaks to the communal lifestyle that involved the care of all, even those in need. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers" (NRSV). Acts 6 further underscores this point. In this chapter we see that members of the Hellenists community complained to the apostolic leadership because widows were being neglected and were in want of food. As a result the apostles called the community of believers together. This gathering and discussion led to a selecting seven individuals who were appointed to the task of caring for widows. From this faith development and action emerged a theological

concept known as the diaconate. The office given to the seven became known as deacon. The word *ministration* in verse one of the sixth chapter and *serve* of verse two are taken from the Greek stem of the word *diakonia*. By definition *diakonia* speaks of service and ministry to those in need. This concept may have begun with charity to widows – providing food – during the days of the early church, but this concept mushroomed to mission and ministry in many areas where people are in need. The Apostle Paul's missions dealt with more than simply preaching the gospel, training elders and establishing churches. It involved benevolent acts as well for assistance with the church in Jerusalem in particular and the poor. So this service concept in the Christian scheme of understanding extends beyond widows and orphans. Certainly people who are uneducated, addicted and living life of aimlessness, because of circumstances or choice, qualify as the needy and stand in need of God's grace.

Specific Ministries as an Expression and Development of the Diaconate

Following the New Testament church's outreach to people in need, history points to some aspects of how societies, especially people of faith, responded to some of these dire circumstances. For the most part the church had missional efforts that were rooted in evangelizing the gospel. This was accompanied by establishing schools and assisting the poor. There were no social service agencies during the Middle Ages that sought to address the woes of society, especially people in need. A glance at the history of western European countries saw a steady evolvement of wars accompanied by devastation and rebuilding. Some countries – especially those with seaport cities, military sites and trade routes/centers – did fairly well due to labor and commerce. Other countries did not fare

as well economically for its citizens. It is difficult, therefore, to trace the church's outreach in that it differed so much from region to region. This unit will therefore examine some aspects of the church's outreach through their mission efforts and the unfolding aspects of the diaconate.

Outreach and Social Services in England in 19th Century

When attention is turned to the British Isle about social relief not just for the poor but for others caught up in a web of aimlessness, attention is focused on Toynbee Hall, a pioneering social settlement in the East End of London. Canon Samuel Augustus Barnett founded this outreach and it was named after the English social reformer Arnold Toynbee.

> During his early years at St. Jude's Church, Barnett invited members of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge to the impoverished working-class district of Whitechapel for holidays to learn about social conditions; his subsequent plan to found a house of residence for graduates wishing to live in an industrial area and to contribute to its life was well supported. With money collected mainly at Oxford, he purchased and reconstructed premises next to St. Jude's; and with his settlers he began the work of participation in local life, development of adult education, collection of social data, and improvement of local social and industrial conditions. Toynbee Hall has continued to serve London's East End via such offerings as a citizens' advice bureau, a free legal advice centre, aid for invalid children, help for alcoholics, a welfare service for the elderly, and theatres for adults and for children. It has undertaken the teaching of adult immigrants and has housed various social and cultural associations.[36]

Toynbee's major work was in England from 1852-83. During this time England as well as Europe was undergoing a change from an "agrarian handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacture. This process began in England in the 18th century and from there spread to other parts of the world. Although used earlier by

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[36] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Toynbee Hall," accessed June 4, 2013, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/601317/Toynbee-Hall.

French writers, the term Industrial Revolution was first popularized by Toynbee to describe England's economic development from 1760 to 1840. Since Toynbee's time the term has been more broadly applied."[37] This model of ministry has been studied and replicated in many ways in many countries in an effort to be intentional in outreach ministry. These issues and the church and society's responds to them would serve as a template for life (and its throes) in America.

Poverty and Its Role in Aimlessness and Deviance

It is of interest to note that there are more poor people in America (and the world) than rich or middle-class people. Some social scientist have two categories for the poor: the working poor and the non-working poor. Most poor people have long histories of jobs, raise families and pay taxes. Most poor people also stay out of jail. There is a glaring, irrefutable fact, however, that there is a disproportionate large percentage of poor (and uneducated) people who are caught up in the throes of criminal activities and are joined -- sometimes with monitors, figuratively and literally -- to the criminal justice system. Absence of any state sanction relief, the church played a significant role in relief and assistance in many areas of life.

The church, right or wrong, was also at the center of giving explanation, in some quarters, about the reasons for poverty.

> As America entered the 1800s, immorality was still believed by many Americans, reflecting the lasting influence of Calvinism, to be the cause of individual poverty and other social problems such as alcoholism. In some ways, this was a reasonable conclusion, given the focus on morality of the colonial church and the major role it performed in caring for the poor. It was also a reasonable conclusion

[37] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Industrial Revolution," accessed June 4, 2013, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/287086/Industrial-Revolution.

> for many Americans, since the nation, in contrast to Europe, offered many opportunities for relatively high-wage jobs and land ownership. In fact, there was a shortage of labor in America.[38]

Many people in the church today associate some poor people, especially those who are unemployed and abusers of substances, as having moral defects. Notwithstanding these attitudes the church has made great strides in social reform not so much with its policy – though advocacy is not to be excluded -- but its actions.

> Organized religion was responsible for much of the development of human services in America. The Puritans, English followers of French Protestant reformer, John Calvin, brought their version of the English poor relief system to America in 1620. When capable, families were expected to care for their needy members, while the church was viewed as an extended family. Overseers of the poor were elected in each parish to collect taxes for the assistance of destitute individuals or families who had no other financial alternatives.[39]

The churches of America either launched social services agencies or groups became para churches launching such organizations to meet the needs of people, especially women and children.

One factor that stood out as the root causes of aimlessness (idleness) is alcohol abuse. This is still one of the contributing factors of today alone with substance (drug) abuse. One leading newspaper addressed this subject matter years ago. Jerry Marx, in his article "Women, Settlements and Poverty," writes,

> Among the causes leading to idleness, poverty, immorality, and crime, the unrestricted use of intoxicating drinks is, beyond question, the most effective in its disastrous results....[40]

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[38] B. S. Jansson, *The Reluctant Welfare State: American Social Welfare Policies-Past, Present, and Future* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1997), 66, 68-69.

[39] J. D. Marx, *Social Welfare: The American Partnership* (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2004), 97-100.

[40] J. D. Marx, "Women, Settlements and the Redefinition of Poverty," The Social Welfare History Project, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/eras/women-settlements-and-poverty.

Alcohol and drug addiction to this day is more of a problem than it was years ago. Sadly, many of the people who are incarcerated are in prison or jail because of alcohol/drug related charges. Only a small percentage of them are getting treatment for addiction. Most social researchers, and lay ones also, point to the fact of a high recidivism rate of person released from prison. The root causes: addiction (without treatment), felony convictions that hamper job possibilities and lack of education and skills. In outreach to a certain segment of at-risk people, an acknowledgement of addiction and measured responses must be a part of any approach.

Again, many persons feel that people who live in poverty with addiction and unwed households are caught in a vicious cycle of a culture lacking in morals and responsibilities. Jerry Marx adds:

> In fact, it was a common belief that poverty was handed down from one immoral generation to the next. A February 17th, 1854 article portrayed people living in poverty and scrounging for basic needs as dishonest and criminal. '…There are *ten thousand children* in this City alone, who are either without parents or friends, or are trained systematically by their parents to vagrancy, beggary and crime: not only shut out utterly and hopelessly from all moral influences, but exposed day and night to the contamination of crime…'[41]

It is interesting to note that women, whether through the church work or civic guilds, played a greater role in addressing the social needs of the day.

> Public opinion began to change during the "Progressive Era," a period in American history from about 1900 to 1920, although there is no precise beginning and end to the era. Following the post-Civil War explosion in industrial growth, it was a time of major reforms in the economic, political, and social institutions of the nation. The driving force behind much of the reform was women. Excluded from influential roles in government, American women created their own voluntary associations through which they advocated for social changes of relevance to themselves and the nation.[42]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

Such is the case today with social services. More women in the church are involved with mission and ministries of outreach and uplift in the community. More women are involved in educational efforts; more women are involved in prison reform; and more women are involved in advocacy for the disadvantage and disenfranchised.

The Black Church and Its Early Missional Efforts

From its inception the black church in America was more than a place of worship and religious instructions. In addition to the preaching of the gospel the church had a social consciousness. The black community in which the church was located and the larger community were family. There was a sense that the lives of black people throughout the land was inextricably woven together. Dialogue about advancement in matters of economics and education was constructed in a larger conversation about "lifting the race." When references were made, to a large degree, about Negroes – as they were called then – language used to identify this group was the "Colored community or the Negro Community." Sociologically speaking, this differed from the ways other ethnic communities were identified.

Carter G. Woodson, in his book *The Negro Church,* highlights some of the history and leadership of the first Negroes to organize churches. He cites an example of Richard Allen, born a slave, but was able to eventually buy his freedom. A Methodist Episcopal at the time Allen had a calling on his life for preaching. Citing the discord in the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church where Allen and other Negroes faced humiliation and a second-class status as members, Allen and a group left and organized what is known today as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Woodson writes,

> The special needs of his own people aroused him to action in their behalf. He said, 'I soon saw a large field open in seeking and instructing my African brethren who have been a long forgotten people, and few of them attended public worship.' Starting a prayer meeting in Philadelphia, he soon had 42 members. Encouraged thus, he proposed to establish a separate place of worship for the people of color, but was dissuaded therefrom by the protest of the whites and certain Negroes unto whom he ministered, only three of whom approved his plan. Preaching at this church, however, with such power as to move his own people in a way that they had never been affected before, he attracted them in such large numbers that the management proposed to segregate the Negroes. When, moreover, the management of the church undertook to carry out this plan so drastically even to the extent of disturbing Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and William White by pulling them off their knees while they were in the attitude of prayer, the Negroes arose and withdrew from the church in a body.[43]

Unlike the establishment of white churches throughout the land with its mission of church life with worship, study, evangelism and benevolence, the Negro Church came into existence as a result of rejection or mistreatment by the white church. The Negro church had in its DNA at birth, as Woodson pointed out, special needs much of which dealt with race.

Another significant marker for life among former slaves and their descendants was organizations that sought to help people of color. "In May of 1787, the same month in which the Constitutional Convention met, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen founded the Free African Society, the first benevolent society organized by African Americans in the United States.[44] Though this organization was formed to assist this dark-skinned religious community whose plight were not brought on by slough, their work extended to help others. Ironically, this organization's demise came about through bankruptcy after

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[43] Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Church* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1921), 74-75.

[44] Explorehistory.com, accessed July 5, 2013, http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-27B.

its members helped in a disease epidemic in Philadelphia which led to financial ruin.[45] The history of the Freedman Aid Society, founded and organized by white Methodists. Presbyterians and Congregational Churches, sought to help descendants of African slaves during the Civil War and afterwards. Though much of the financial backers and organizational leaders were whites, Negro church people played a significant role in this ministry of education. It is underscored throughout history again and again how the Negro church aided in outreach and uplift to people of color in their communities and afar. Their history was shared and their lives were linked. Woodson points out in his book the early involvement of Negro preachers and churches and how many ministers were educators and how others entered politics all in efforts to uplift the race. One example he cites in his book is of Dr. C. T. Walker, a prominent Baptist minister who served mostly in New York City and Augusta, Georgia.

> Coming under the influence of Christian missionaries and of the Atlanta Baptist College, he [Walker] had his beginnings determined in an atmosphere of religious education. For forty years, excepting five years when he had a charge of the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, New Your City, he was pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia. His church in Augusta was attended not only by thousands of his own race but by hundreds of tourists, who heard him with unusual satisfaction. Among these were former President Taft, John D. Rockefeller, Gen. Rush C. Hawkins, Dr. David Gregg and Lyman B. Goff. With the support of such a large number this church undertook to supply the needs of the community, developing into an institutional enterprise with all of the activities of a social welfare agency. Dr. Walker was interested in all things promoting the uplift of the race. He was the founder of the now spacious 135th Street Branch, Young Men's Christian Association, New York City, and figured largely in the establishment of a similar branch for his people in Augusta, Georgia.[46]

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Woodson, 244-245.

Here we see the consciousness of people of faith not only concern with the spiritual being of the people of their communities but also their physical, mental, economic and overall wellbeing. It has been said by many that the church is not supposed to be a social service agency. Apparently no one told this to some of the early Negro clergy and lay pioneers of the faith and church.

The Black Church and the Last Fifty Years

Notwithstanding the intentionality of some people of faith in working toward establishing and maintaining a multi-racial composition of the church, church researchers remind us that integrated churches only make up 5% to 8% of church population in America. Years ago Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "eleven o'clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour and Sunday school is still the most segregated school of the week."[47]

> The Congregations Project, based at Rice, is believed to be the first large study focused on racial and ethnic diversity within Christian houses of worship. Emerson and colleagues say the data show that mixed churches are a rare breed in America--counting for only 8 percent. The researchers regard a "mixed" congregation as one with at least 20 percent of its members providing racial or ethnic diversity. Ironically, the poorest record on diversity--only 2 to 3 percent mixed on average--belongs to historic Protestant churches, which were among the first to trumpet the ideal of integrated congregations. Many mainline clergy were stirred by the civil rights movement of the 1960s to render obsolete the observation, usually attributed to Martin Luther King Jr., that "11 A.M. Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week in America."[48]

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[47] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Eleven O'clock Sunday Morning," accessed May 23, 2013, http://store.fortresspress.com/media/downloads/0800664604Intro.pdf.

[48] Hartfordinstitute.org, accessed June 4, 2013, http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/cong/articles_huesinthepews.html.

Some of the black churches today, and some mixed or white urban churches, have a consciousness to be involved in ministry to people in need of miracles in their lives. Not all of these miracles are recovery from dreadful and deadly diseases; some of them are addiction, affliction and aimlessness of the young and the not-so young. On many street corners where churches are located one will find drug transaction, fencing of stolen goods and people hanging out in what law enforcement call loitering. The gospel needs to speak to these people in a desperate way.

The Black Church and Black Consciousness

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in their book *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* examines some of the internal structure of the seven largest mainline African American church denominations. This books looks at some of "societal challenges, contemporary black culture and the Church's relationship to politics, economics, women, youth, and music and trends." This book speaks about the distinctiveness of 'Black Consciousness' in the black church. Black consciousness speaks to, according to the authors, "the last half century of revolution of consciousness that encompasses all black institutions, including the Black Church."[49] This consciousness includes understanding the dynamics and consequences of urbanization, the labor movement, and social change especially in cities and urban centers, and how all of this contributed to a group identity and a sense of solidarity.[50] (As a student at Morehouse School of Religion of the Interdenominational Theological Center, this writer had the opportunity along with

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[49] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 165.

[50] Ibid.

others to assist in the collection of data for this book through interviews and surveys, and his name is mentioned in the forward of the book). Black consciousness, according to Lincoln and Mamiya, involve the role of the church as it relates to education, poverty, sermon content (black or liberation theology), community outreach programs, and expressions of black ecumenism.[51] Again black theology is a part of the expression of how some sectors of the black church sees itself in outreach and ministry. There is a wedding of black theology, practical theology (with its theology of hope motif) and the social gospel all converging in some aspects of ministry in outreach to black people in particular in black communities throughout this land. Biblical motifs are present in how the church articulates this message. Leviticus chapter 25 deals with the poverty of God's people, the Israelites, and with the responsibility of fellow-Israelites to come to the aid of the distressed. The tenets and principles that we see here are also expressed in the gospel and the rest of the New Testament. Black theology is a part of this black consciousness as it relates to mission and the work of the church.

> Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity … The message of liberation is the revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom IS the gospel. Jesus is Liberation![52]

Plumbing "the black condition" is something that the church is in desperate need of doing. Not every church has the resources, know how, man/woman power and infrastructure to tackle the issues that plague so much of the black community; however,

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[51] Ibid., 171-195.

[52] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Examination of the Black Experience in Religion* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1972), 262.

to do nothing is not an option. Black people can learn volumes from their forbearers about the value of collaboration. These people, who had so little by way of finances, were able to accomplish so much even though they had the backing and financial support of many white philanthropists, white denominations and some white churches.

Men In Christ Model of Ministry as a New Diaconate

The church's role in mission is not to be only to those listed among the Parable of the Last Judgment: the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, stranger, and prisoner. There are many persons in need of assistance in the communities where churches are located, and the church must seek to address the needs of these persons along with social services agencies. What if the faithful could hear the words of Jesus in a latter-day parable saying, "I had an addiction; I was in an abusive relationship, I was unemployable, I was un-parented, I am number among the incorrigible." Would they follow this by saying "Lord, when did we see you in …." For sure the church cannot solve all of the problems of the people of the community. It can, however, be intentional in some measures of outreach that includes its theology, its message, its outreach and the establishment and support of its ministries. In his article "Speak Truth to Power: Theology and Public Policy," Duncan B. Forrester writes "… it is far more common for the poor and weak to be denied a voice. Liberation theologians characteristically see a central part of their role as standing with and speaking for the poor and the excluded, the ones who are common without a voice, fulfilling the biblical injunction (Prov. 31:8-9)."[53] The at-risk

[53] Richard R. Osmer and Freidrich R. Schweitzer, eds., *Developing a Public Faith* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 180.

community is involved here. The church's role hence is more than outreach; it also involves advocacy.

The early part of this historical foundation writing spoke of the theology of and work toward those in need under the banner of the *diaconate*. For many denominations this office (diaconate) requires specialized training and is considered a ministerial office as a profession or vocation. Perhaps the church would do well to revisit the meaning and ministry of the diaconate (service ministry). Helping people discern that gifts and mobilizing them for ministry as a vocation in the church may require new language for this age. James Fowler gives a critique and meaning to the word vocation in this regard.

> We must reclaim the term vocation form guidance counsellors and occupational therapist and from a too-narrow association with the world of work. Nor may we allow it to refer only to the calling of priests, nuns, ministers, and those pursuing 'full-time Christian professional service.' Vocation is a larger concept than career, occupation or profession.[54]

Men In Christ is a ministry of outreach to at-risk persons which is doing more than reaching out. It is helping the men in this group discern their gifts and work in those areas along with seeking training and certification in these respective areas. Further developing the concept of vocation Fowler writes,

> Vocation includes our leisure, our relational life, our roles as citizens, our roles as members of families; it includes our religious activities and our work, paid or volunteer. Vocation is a way of pointing to what gives coherence, meaning and purpose to our lives, to what links us and our labors to some center of value and power upon whom we recognize ourselves to be dependent.[55]

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[54] James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stocks Publishers, 2010), 158.

[55] Ibid.

This understanding of vocation linked with the Christian understanding of discipleship will add to the faith consciousness of engaging people in ministry, many of whom live life in the shadows, across the tracks and lead lives of quiet desperation.

Leadership of the clergy is so important in this ministry. One of the roles of the clergy is that of pastoral care. This involves a sense of outreach to not only the sick but also drawing near of persons who are struggling morally or facing great need. Many churches feel impotent to do ministry in this area. Addressing this subject from the perspective of Christian caring and practical theology, Friedrick Schleiermacher writes,

> There are times in life when the problem is not a lack of knowledge but is a feeling that one lacks the power to do what is right; in moments of temptation, for example, one may seek assistance with regard to one's moral powers. Here, too, we immediately encounter something else: one's moral powers may be so burdened that one's state of mind becomes troubled. In this case the person wanted to be strengthen.[56]

The faithful must be reminded that the promises of Jesus is to be with them and to provide the needed resources to endure and to overcome. In outreach to the at-risk, though danger is sometimes faced, the faithful must be reminded of the words of Jesus that "it is in giving (of ourselves) that we receive." Jesus also told a parable about how heaven rejoices over a lost sheep that is found and restored to the fold. Will heaven also rejoice over an addict that is on a sober streak, over an abuser who acknowledges his ways and is reforming, over men who have been non responsive to their children who are now becoming responsible and over the aimlessness that is finding purpose in life and a

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[56] James O. Duke and Howard Stone, eds., *Christian Caring: Selections form Practical Theology*, James O. Stone, trans. (Valley Forge, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 65.

place in the church? It is toward these endeavors that the Men in Christ at Bethel Church is engaged in this specific ministry.

Theological Foundations

Launching a project of Men In Christ (MIC) based at Bethel Church targeting Blount County Tennessee is a major endeavor. It involves bringing together men from the membership of Bethel Church as well as men from other churches in the community. Some of these men are active in their churches as well as civic and social affairs in the area while some are not. All of them, however, are committed to working toward meeting constructive goals to enrich the lives of many youth and young adults African Americans. The biblical foundations in support of these outreach efforts are taken from the Old Testament text of I Samuel 10:17-26 and the New Testament text of Luke 5:17-26. Having explored what biblical scholars have said about this subject, attention is now turned to the theological implications of this outreach along with what theologians have said about this subject.

Again, the project for this doctoral program is "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee." The premise in this endeavor is that too many youth and young adults find themselves in a web of temptation when it comes to drug abuse, pre-marital sex, illegal activities and a lifestyle of aimlessness. Too many youth and young adults are caught up in monitoring by the criminal justice system, and too many young people are dropping out of high school. There is a high rate of pregnancy among unwed mothers and too many fathers have walked away from their responsibilities of caring for their children and are noticeably

absent from their lives. What message does the gospel speak to all of this? How are these discussions framed theologically? In this narrative the writer will address these two texts mentioned above from the perspective of practical theology and all that it entails: theology of hope, liberation theology, existentialism, the anomie theory and black rage and a theology of hope revisited.

The Urban Crisis

In the latter part of the 1960s, sociologists and cultural anthropologists along with others put forth a dialogue on the topic "the urban crisis." The historian Thomas J. Sugrue authored a book, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, in which he highlighted the role that race, housing and job discrimination played in the decline of Detroit. This was followed by much commentary, articles and books on this subject that address this malaise in many urban centers throughout the country. Sugrue chronicles the history of Detroit from one of America's most vibrant places with a high blue-collar population, jobs, industries, housing and communities to a city (area) that has lost one million residents and tens of thousands of jobs that resulted in closed factories, abandoned centers and stores and over ten thousand vacant houses.[57] Accompanying this decline was drug addiction, high levels of crime and a disintegration of the community. Notwithstanding the automotive bailout and General Motors and Chryslers' rebound with sales surpassing corporate expectations, even while this narrative is being penned, the city of Detroit, in economic distress, has filed for bankruptcy.

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[57] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, accessed May 2, 2013, www.http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/i8029.html.

Forty-plus-years have passed since this phenomenon not only in Detroit but also many other urban centers. To a large extent, things have gotten worse. Many of the so-called bedroom communities and rural districts are now facing this phenomena. It would be naïve to say, though the nation has come a long ways, that discrimination and race are no longer factors. Accompanying the urban crisis of yesteryear today is increased violence, widespread drug abuse, a disintegration of the family, a large black male population that is tied to the criminal justice system as well as a higher-than- the-national-average jobless rate among African Americans with its youth and young adults having even a higher rate.

Today's urban crisis is more pressing than that of the sixties and seventies. To address this problem it is imperative that the clergy and lay leadership are not only spiritual but also have an understanding of social science as it relates to the sociology of people, economics and a thorough understanding of their communities and the problems that exist.

Practical Theology

Much of the Christian church is consumed today with a theology that deals with biblical inerrancy, Trinitarian theology and the theology of the cross. Many faith communities defined themselves with a doctrinal litmus test. We know, in the seminary community, that there are many subsets of theologies. Among the many categories of theology is practical theology. Its basic premise is that it deals with the question of theology's relationship to "thought and action." The theologian Friedrich Schleirmacher coined the term "practical theology" in the 18th century. As one reflects upon the Old

and New Testament primary texts expounded upon in the biblical foundations, one sees two groups of men doing theology. Their work can be understood in the context of practical theology in that they were wedding their faith (thought) to action (deeds). The first group were men (whose hearts God had touched) accompanying Saul to establish the kingship of Israel (I Samuel 10:20-26). The second group were men carrying a paralytic man to Jesus for healing (Luke 5:17-26). These men had faith in Jesus and believed that he could heal this infirmed man.

Again, practical theology weds "religious thought to action." Though practical theology may be relatively new in the scheme of theology itself, its roots are in the teachings of Jesus – especially in his teachings on the Kingdom of God. Gerben Heitink underscored this thought in his book *Practical Theology*. He writes, "The Kingdom of God which has strongly emerged since the 1950s fits with the historical consciousness in the period of rebuilding after WW II. Trusting God's future, it places considerable emphasis on human responsibility, often referred to by the term stewardship. The eschatological character of the kingdom encourages the anticipation of God's work in a praxis of hope and liberation."[58] People caught up in addictive and devastating behaviors have human responsibility to be better and to do better. The gospel, however, compels us to be kind to strangers and to help our neighbor. Hence, the church and its believers have a measure of responsibility as well in this regard. The term kingdom of God is operative here in that so many of God's people, those who are members of the covenant as well as others, live life as Howard Thurman said "With their backs up against the walls."

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[58] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Company, 1993), 198.

Practical theology is at the center of the Men In Christ (MIC) group that seeks to share God's love with those who are caught up in destructive behavior and live with their backs against the walls.

Heitink's speaks of God's work in a praxis of hope and liberation. This hope not only calls an individual from a life of sin but also from addiction, being an abuser and a life of aimlessness. This liberation from sin is operative. This praxis speaks to the community of faith actively involved not only in confessing Jesus as Lord to the unbeliever but also Jesus as liberator and one who gives us personal freedom. Heitink goes on to write about an "exodus model which connects the notion of 'God's' people en route with a praxis of liberation."[59] A part of the church's work – and that of MIC – is to bridge the gap of leading people out of the bondage of sin thus making the "exodus" model come alive. In this model one sees not only God leading the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage but the gospel, the word of God, and the Spirit leading people out of whatever bondage they find themselves involved.

Theology of Hope

A central theme of the Christian faith is hope. Jurgen Moltmann, more so than any other persons in the twentieth century, expounded and expanded upon the theme "theology of hope." This thought entered the center of theological debate with Moltmann's book *Theology of Hope: The Ground and Implications of Christian Eschatology*. Moltmann's book concludes with a chapter entitled "Exodus Community."

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[59] Ibid., 199.

In this chapter Moltmann talks about the political and sociological implications of hope.[60] Martin R. Tripole, in commenting on Moltmann and the "exodus community," writes, "one of Moltmann's major convictions that the absolute separation of the political world and the Christian community is not compatible with the Christian message."[61] Such is the case with the Men In Christ ministry in Blount County. It is not enough for these men (this group) to witness to the love of God. Equally important is the praxis (work) of demonstrating that through faith God is able to lead people out of bondage (of any type) in a latter day "exodus."

On a recent edition of the popular news magazine show "60 Minutes," a correspondent profiled a community in Massachusetts that was under siege by gangs where the people lived in fear. The local police department collaborated with the state police for a special operation to combat this plague. Using a military term, police officers became embedded in these communities to gain the trust of the residents so that they could work toward apprehending those who visited fear and violence upon this community. Part of the strategy was to have a monthly meeting of people who were invested in the community. At this table of collaboration were social service agencies, educational agencies, relief agencies and other community organizations. There was no mentioned of church participation. In fact, the words church, clergy or faith community were not even mentioned in the entirety of the broadcast. One would not have to Google this city's name to learn how many churches were present in this community. The Men

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[60] Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: The Ground and Implications of Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 232.

[61] Martin R. Tripole, *Ecclesiological Development in Moltmann's Theology of Hope*, accessed August 1, 2013, http://www.ts.mu.edu/readers/content/pdf/34/34.1/34.1.2.pdf, p. 19.

in Christ (MIC) sees itself as being embedded in the community of Blount County. It sees itself as being in the lead not only utilizing the resources of the church but also networking with agencies to address the plight and blight on the lives of so many of its citizens who are at risk.

Much of the discussion of hope that is preached and taught in churches today deal with "deliverance from the penalty of sin" and "being heaven bound." These are certain tenants of the faith and are not to be soft pedaled. However, people who face so much pain, poverty, isolation and abuse are sometimes immune, or so it seems, to the outreach of the gospel that is void of any consideration of these individuals' circumstances outside of their sinfulness. The black church from its early establishment in America had a unique and tender way about its outreach in spite of its shortcomings. At the center of its mission was a sense of community, self-esteem and outreach.

Peter Paris, a professor of Christian social ethics, underscores the early function of the church as it relates to the black community. He writes,

> Thus the multifarious functions of the black church justify the claim that they have been the institutional center of the black community; the basic source of religious and moral values; diligent in protecting the community from the many and varied abuses of racism by comforting the wounded, restoring dignity to the demoralized, hope to the despairing and redirection to those bent on harboring attitudes of bitterness and hatred as well as those disposed to acts of violence; prudent in devising and implementing forms of protest against racial injustices.[62]

Recognizing the richness of its history and its calling, the Men in Christ group sees itself in this tradition not just because it is a black tradition but because it is a part of their theological understanding. Identifying people, engaging them, confronting and

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[62]Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). 8-9.

comforting them and redirecting them is a part of this ministry. Paris has more to say about the scope of the work and mission of the black church. He writes,

> Black churches have advocated the support of black businesses, established and maintained educational institutions, strengthened family life, provided a perspective for assessing the moral quality of the nation, and been closely allied with countless civil rights organizations and all other activities aimed at racial improvement[63]

A sense of deliverance and liberation is primary in this work. This is not enough however. Paris goes on to address ways in which lives can be enriched.

The black church has done its work in a remarkable way by relating the many stories of faith found in both the Old and New Testaments. The stories found there have many parallels with the lives of people today. Through these stories people see similarities in themselves and the biblical characters as well as the human predicament. Ed Wimberly, a United Methodist professor of pastoral care, underscores this when he said,

> I have also come to realize that the Bible stories with which I identified as a child functioned to bring healing and wholeness in my life despite some of the negative convictions that I had about myself. The more I addressed the negative perceptions I had of myself through therapy, the more I could discern the role that Bible stories had in shaping my positive sense of self.[64]

Here Wimberly lifts up these biblical stories while citing the brokenness and alienation in the people of faith. He does not simply rail at society; he acknowledges some of his own insecurities. It is quite noteworthy that this preacher and teacher of pastoral care acknowledges his own struggles in life (and faith) by citing the counseling and therapy that he has gone through

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Edward Wimberly, *Using Scripture in Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 15.

in life. The writer would like to note that Dr. Wimberly was his pastoral care professor over thirty years ago at the Interdenominational Theological Center.

The Men In Christ organization has persons involved in this ministry who are not by some standards active church members. There are many people of conscious who believe in good will and the uplift of all people who are actively involved in organizations of outreach. During the heydays of the Civil Rights movement many Jewish organizations, as well as black Muslims, were involved in the struggle for civil and human rights. Practical theology recognizes the need for others' involvement. James Fowler commented on this subject matter when he wrote,

> We must be clear that the praxis of God is not limited to the action of leadership of religious organizations and leaders. The Spirit of God can and does address peoples and movements involved in other faith traditions than our own. And the Spirit does, I believe, influence and call persons in secular positions of leadership toward acts of courage and self-giving in the service of justice and peace.[65]

Acts of "courage and self-giving in service of justice and peace" best describe the work of Men In Christ.

The Black Church and Its Embrace of Black Theology

In the late 1960s in America there was a heightened consciousness in many black churches as it pertained to racism in America and the mobilization of churches along with civic and social organization campaigning for what some people called civil rights. This mobilization of forces -- black, white and brown -- developed into what is known today as a significant period of the Civil Rights Movement. Notable among the national legislation passed because of these efforts were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The former act

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[65] James Fowler, 158.

outlawed discrimination against people of color and women along with discrimination based on one's religion. The latter act removed barriers for voting that had denied so many blacks the opportunity to vote. Out of this movement came a philosophy of Black Power. James Brown struck a chord with his 1968 hit song "I'm Black and I'm Proud." During this time many academics in theological institutions were declaring their independence from classical theology and there emerged what is known today as Black Theology. It can be argued that the activities and praxis of black people of faith spearheaded primarily by and through the church was now having a handle – Black Power/Black Theology -- given to it.

It should be noted that the work of Men In Christ is part of the ongoing work of Christian discipleship steeped in the tradition of Black Theology or Liberation Theology. There is no uniform definition for Black Theology. James Cones, a theologian at Union Theological Seminary, more than any other individual, was among the first to give clear articulation to the subject of Black Theology. He writes,

> Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that their inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.[66]

Black theology (and liberation theology) is actually tied in closely with an aspect of practical theology with its emphasis on the wedding of "thought and action." Many people in Blount County Tennessee and other communities face many forms of oppression. Some of it is rooted in race and has politics as its backdrop. Some of the

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[66]James H. Cone, *Liberation: Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970), 17.

oppression, however, is rooted in poor choices, dire circumstances and addiction. Cone underscores this further:

> The resurrection-event means that God's liberating work is not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by principalities and powers. The resurrection conveys hope in God. Nor is this the 'hope' that promises a reward in heaven in order to ease the pain of injustice on earth. Rather it is a hope which focuses on the future in order to make men refuse to tolerate present inequities.[67]

At work in many communities are all sorts of principalities and powers that enslave and tear down. The praxis of the church in addressing these principalities against the backdrop of understanding the resurrection offers hope to many. Cone goes on to say "The task of Christian theology, then, is to analyze the meaning of hope in God in such a way that the oppressed community of a given society will risk all for earthly freedom, a freedom made possible in the resurrection of Christ."[68] People of faith, Men In Christ included, face a different type of threat in ministering to people who are oppressed. Hardly a day passes when the newscast does not report on some good Samaritan, law enforcement or otherwise, losing his or her life seeking to help people who are victims of domestic violence, human trafficking or drug addiction. Cone speaks to this aspect of the work of Black Theology when he said,

> The truly Christian response to earthly existence is doing what one must do because it is the human thing to do. The brother's suffering should not be used as a stepping-stone in Christian piety. This may be what Jesus had in mind when he told the parable of the Last Judgment. People are received and rejected according to their ministering to human need.[69]

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[67] Ibid., 21.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 237.

The church is at its best when it not only preaches compassion but demonstrates it for the entire world to see. Men In Christ see themselves in this tradition as laborers in the field of the harvest.

Anomie Theory and Black Rage: Beyond Excuses

In many communities today, especially some minorities ones, one may observe a mindset of individuals, mostly young people, who have a consciousness of deviance and void, or so it seems, of some measure of decency as it pertains to the treatment of others and the respect of the law. In 1968, two black psychiatrists addressed this subject by revealing the full dimensions of the inner conflicts and desperation of black life in America. This work was presented in their book *Black Rage*. William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, the authors, examined the range of black life from the vantage point of psychiatry. This writing explores the subjects of desperation, conflict and anger.[70] Much of this rage expounded upon by the authors was rooted in anger stemming from racial animas and the lack of opportunities. Much of this rage still exists today. While some of it is still rooted in racism, much of it has its base in a myriad of factors.

When one looks at a demographic group of African American youth in Blount County, Tennessee, one sees a substantial number of young men who have dropped out of school. Many of them have no jobs or prospects for job. Some of them have records (felonies) which prevent them from being employed. Many of them hang out on corners and engaged in illegal and illicit behavior from drug usage and selling and theft. The plight for young African American women is disheartening as well. Some dropped out of

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[70] William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968), 4.

school because of childbirth and other reasons. Some have limited skills. And some are too caught up in a culture of drug usage. Added to this is a sense of rage that some of these young people have. Sociologists have given a name to this breakdown in social behavior. It is called the "anomie" theory.

> Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, introduced the concept. He used anomie to describe a condition of deregulation that was occurring in society. This meant that rules on how people ought to behave with each other were breaking down and thus people did not know what to expect from one another. Anomie, simply defined, is a state where norms (expectations on behaviors) are confused, unclear or not present.[71]

Durkheim's observation is found to be operative in the behavior of individuals and groups in many communities of all colors. Destructive behavior of many young people are ruining lives. As much as the writer would like to dodge the subject, much of this behavior is beyond destructive; it is deviant. This deviant behavior must be addressed not only in the halls of academic centers and the courts but also in the faith communities. Robert Merton addressed this anomie theory when he wrote:

> Primary interest is not so much why particular individual deviates, but why the rates of deviance differ so dramatically in different societies and for different subgroups within a single society. Merton works within the overall functionalist perspective that we have already addressed, which puts a great deal of emphasis on the role of culture, particularly its unifying aspects, but now Merton adapts a concept he borrows from Durkheim to analyze situations in which cultural norms break down because of rapid change.[72]

So we have social scientists – both psychologists with their theories of black rage and sociologists with their theories of anomie – weighing in on the subject of behavior of groups of individuals. It is imperative that the clergy and the church's lay leadership

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[71] Hewett.norfolk, accessed May 23, 2013, http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/curric/soc/anomie.htm.

[72] Robert Merton, "Anomie Theory," accessed May 23, 2013, http://www.d.umn.edu/~bmork/2306/Theories/BAManomie.htm.

have an understanding of human behavior and some of its causes if it is to be minimally effective in reaching some of these at-risk persons, many of whom do not fear the law nor value human life. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have transformative powers to meet people where they are and work with them. For the believers of faith the story that Jeremiah tells of God as the potter shaping human lives is real. This has been the experience of many, and it must be shared with others who desperately need it. Just as a band of men – whose hearts God had touched -- accompanied Saul when he launched out to start the nation, the church in its mission must see themselves in an apostolic vein not only in teaching the truths of God but in reaching and lifting those in bondage.

Theology of Hope Revisited

Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, brought a great deal of consciousness to the subject of existentialism. In this book he speaks of love as the highest form of hope, and it was this love/hope that enabled him to endure the rigors of the Nazi concentration camp.[73] The goal of this work in the life of the church is to seek to help this targeted group find meaning in their lives through love and hope. The church does not need to change its message of the gospel to these individuals; it needs to articulate it in a clearer context that others can understand. A good place to start is with the New Testament tenet of faith: "God saves." In his book the *God We Never Knew*, Marcus Borg writes about how his understanding of salvation has evolved over the years. In the chapter "Salvation: What on Earth Do We Mean?" Borg addresses how the classical New Testament understanding of salvation deals with confession of faith that

[73] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 48.

leads to being release from the penalty of sin (damnation and hell) and the offer of a better afterlife. Borg addresses the subject of how this salvation in the Old Testament differs.

> The first explicit unambiguous reference to life after death is in the last chapter of the book of Daniel, written around the year 165 B.C.E.[74]

He goes on to say that this understanding was not essential to faithfulness at this specific time.

> Throughout all of these centuries, the people of ancient Israel seem not to have believed in life after death. This means that for most of the biblical period, ancient Israel's life with God was not motivated by hope of an afterlife. Yet they spoke and wrote about salvation and the importance of taking God seriously.[75]

Borg revisits the word salvation. He writes,

> Salvation comes from the same root as 'salve,' a healing ointment. Salvation thus has to do with healing the wounds of existence. This is not small matter, for the wounds of existence are many and deep. Some of these wounds are inflicted on us; some are the result of our own doing, and some we inflict on others....[76]

The Christian church, or so it seems, has not caught up with Borg's evolving understanding of salvation as it relates to the "wounds" that people live with daily. Borg highlights the metaphors and images of deliverance in the Old Testament in the context of how they speak to God's saving acts. The church today speaks of God's willingness to heal, change and lift; however, this is rarely linked with God's saving acts. Borg uses these images and metaphors and talk about how "bondage and liberation" as a part of the wounded ongoing narrative in life and how God saves or delivers. He cites yet

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[74] Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 157.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 157.

another biblical image of "estrangement and reconciliation" and ties it to the wound of the "exile." Again, salvation comes about through deliverance. A third image that Borg speaks of is "salvation as enlightenment." Here he ties the motif of the wound to "the coming light" as found in many passages of scripture including the Psalms. One of the references that Borg cites is very powerful. It is "salvation as experiencing the love of God."[77]

Here Borg writes,

> This understanding of salvation is closely related, though not identical, to that of salvation as forgiveness. It is similar in that it involves a transformation as self-understanding from 'condemned' or 'rejected' to 'beloved of God.' But knowing the love of God can also heal other wounds. Some people have a sense of being worthless, of little account, unlovely and loveless. For such people, salvation means being able to hear and internalize Isaiah's words about how God regards us: 'You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.' To know that one is not worthless but precious, not unlovely and loveless but beloved by God, is a salvific experience.[78]

Evangelism speaks to sharing the good news of forgiveness, eternal life (salvation) and a life of faith. Mission outreach to persons who are wounded, beaten down, afflicted, overlooked and caught in a web of addiction, sexual promiscuity and aimlessness should also be punctuated with the salvific motif of not only the newness of life that God offers in the afterlife but also the present (salvific) "ointment" to the walking wounded today. It seems that para church groups engaged in ministry to the homeless, drug addicted and mentally ill does a better job at this collectively than the Christian church.

The outreach to youth and young adults – or anyone – is often tied into "faith and good works." Following Borg's salvation motif the Men in Christ group is intentionally

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[77]Ibid., 158-161.

[78] Ibid., 163.

involved in an evangelistic outreach to seek and save the lost and hurting among this group. It seeks to share the love of God and point to and participate in the healing and renewing promises of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This project, "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee," proposes to make an assessment of some of the most pressing needs in the Blount County area facing youth and young adults particularly and bring forth a ministry project to address some of these needs. The primary site of this context is Alcoa, Tennessee, (Blount County) where the writer serves as senior minister. Alcoa, Tennessee, is one of five municipalities located in Blount County just outside of the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. Bethel Church was organized in 1908 and is the oldest black church in Blount County. This congregation is composed primarily of middle age and elderly members; however, there are some young adults and youth, most of whom are not actively engaged in the church's ministry. Though Bethel Church will be the primary site for this project, the county in which it lies also serves as its targeted audience.

As stated in Chapter One, the group that will be spearheading this project is composed of men from Bethel Church as well as other men who are from other churches in the county. What began as a men's group that engage primarily in fellowship and meetings with guest speakers, now finds itself turning from inwardness to outreach in its focus. This group has taken on the title "Men In Christ (MIC)." This group sometimes refers to itself as "Men In the Community." Each person in this group sees the need for outreach and direct action. Some of these men are retired while others are still in the job

force. All of men, except for four, of the Men In Christ participants are retired. The vocation of these men – retired and active – are engineer, builder, truck driver, ministers, publisher/writer, military, social worker and plant workers at Alcoa Aluminum Company. Although the work and aim of these men is to reach persons who need an upward hand, that which is not lost is that this is the work of discipleship and evangelism. And though this work is social in context, the men are not shy or coy about using the language of faith that include salvation, being born again and transformation.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that, through an intentional ministry rooted in the word of God, transformation is possible even for those who feel defeated and left out. Through personal engagement, selected preaching and teaching, mentoring and focus seminars, many adolescences and young adults can begin the process of transitioning from a life of low self-esteem to one of purpose. The goal is not to simply broadcast and advertise that the Men In Christ group has a program that is based out of Bethel Church and that interested persons can inquire. Rather, it is to intentionally develop contacts and relationships with stakeholders such as the public school system, neighborhood centers and the courts to identify persons who would most benefit from this ministry. The next step would be to establish contact with parents of these young persons to get their permission and input for participation. Though this effort identifies itself as a model of ministry, there is the acknowledgement that it is actually a ministry project that is, in part, finding its way as it goes along. Some of the persons that will benefit from this ministry are members of Bethel Church. Others are persons that members of Bethel Church know

or have some sort of relationship. As a retired counsellor in the public school of Alcoa and an active participant in the life of the community, this writer is already aware of many students and their parents.

Immediate Stakeholders

The context associates who participated in this process are Gloria Miller (the writer's wife), Judy Knight, Rev. Carr Stone, Rev. Lorrin Harris, Deacon Paul Sudderth, Sylvia Porter, Mr. Glen Sankey, Mr. Logan Hill, Dr. Joe Maddox Mrs. Alice Burrows and Chianti Woodlee. The professional associates involved in this project are Dr. Keri Prigmore (educator/administrator in the Alcoa City Schools), Dr. LaKeisha Reeves (a UTS graduate), and Dr. Scott Porter, a principal at Alcoa High School. The most active persons in the group, Men In Christ, and members of Bethel Church, are Chianti Woodlee, Rodney Robinson, Glenn Sankey, Cleon Siler, Logan Hill, Robert Orange, and McKinley Flowers. Other members of Men In Christ who are from other churches are Rev. Stone Carr (former pastor of Bethel Church), Rev. Larry Shearer (a pastor in the community), Paul Sudderth, Chester Brabson, Dr. Lorrin Harris, and Rod Jackson.

Intervention (Description of Ministry Project)

The primary areas of focus for this work is to highlight the current reality of many young people who are failing in school, having run-ins with the law, using and selling drugs, low self-esteem and a sense of aimlessness in life. The writer believes, in his passion for ministry as articulated in his spiritual autobiography, that some of these young people can be reached before they spiral out of control and land in trouble that will

haunt them for the rest of their lives. It is the belief that by establishing a relationship with the young, through the efforts of the group Men In Christ, people can be reached, have their conscience examined and redirected into not only faith but also increase self-esteem and meaning and purpose in their lives. By recruiting individuals (and their parents), through the preached word of God (with its built-in assertion that it will not come back void), workshops and one-on-one mentoring, lives can be touched and transformed. These things will unfold in the following manner as part of the ministry project.

- Sermon series
- Bible study series
- Symposiums (individual workshops and panel discussion) on "The Judicial System and Young People of Color," "Requirements for High School Graduation," "Public School and Discipline," "Law Enforcement: Ramifications of Truancy, Delinquency and Drugs," and "The Labor Force and Unskilled Workers."
- Recruitment
- Gatherings of Celebrations and Affirmations

This ministry project was launched with a city-wide celebration of churches highlighting the gift of young people and the community's role in rearing and mentoring them. The month of August of 2014 was given to a series of Sermons from two passages of scripture that highlights men engaged in the demonstration of faith and outreach. The sermon, "A Band of Men," was preached the first two Sundays in August (Part I and II). The text for this sermon was I Samuel 10:17-26 (See Appendix C). The sermons focused on how God used a young man named Saul to be the first King and how a dedicated band of men (warriors) whose hearts God had touched, followed and worked with him. The

seeds of faithful discipleship speaks to how a group of dedicated persons (Men In Christ) can accomplish much by way of faith in investing into the lives of young people. The last two Sundays in August was given to sermons from the text Luke 5:17-26 (Part I and II). The sermon title was "Raising the Roof." In this text and sermon four men brought a paralytic to Jesus for healing. They were hampered in this effort in that the house where Jesus was teaching was full and a crowd was on the outside as well. Not being thwarted by these obstacles, the men hoisted the lame man on the roof, remove tiles and lowered him into the house at the feet of Jesus. The discipleship implication was that people (Men In Christ) of faith can go through great lengths to get people to Jesus for healing and wholeness. The bible study series tied in directly to the same two texts and were held at Bethel Church on the four Wednesdays in August. More attention and detail was given to these texts (See Appendix D).

A daylong symposium was held on August 23, 2014 at Bethel Church to address issues facing and hampering the growth and development of young people in Blount County. The various workshops is mentioned above in the bullet items; the accompanying appendices with be cited in Chapter Five, Field Experience. The Men In Christ, as part of its work, is recruiting young people to be a part of this ministry project. This group is also sponsoring a quarterly banquet meal with these students and their parents to celebrate milestones, however minimal, in their lives. Some of the celebrations and awards are centered on perfect attendance for a prescribed period, making the honor roll and civic participation. These citations may seem a bit frivolous in that such awards are not necessary for small steps forward; however, MIC believes that young people, when recognized in a positive light, are given more incentive to press forward. Persons

being mentored by the MIC group attend this event along with their parents, school officials and church members.

Research Design

An explanation of data collection was shared with the context associates and Men In Christ group to let them know that this was a school requirement. The writer also helped the group to understand that this was needed as well in that this ministry would not cease with the pastor's completion of his school work or departure from the church at some point. Data is needful to help see where the work is going, how many people participate and what can be done to enhance the work. The methodology used in this project was a mixed methodology. John W. Creswell, in his book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, presents an inquiry that looks at different forms of research. By mixing the methods in research design, the researcher, as well as others who look at the work, can see some philosophical assumptions.[1] Creswell distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative research deals with an instrument for testing theories that are objective by using variables. This deals with numbers as data.[2] Qualitative research, on the other hand, looks at research derived from questions and procedures in the context of a social or human problem. This data is then analyze.[3] The pre-test survey had questions that were both open ended and closed ended (See Appendix E).

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[1] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2009), 230.

[2] Ibid., 233.

[3] Ibid., 230.

Measurement

This section of the methodology involves the work and purpose of the pre-test surveys. Pre-test survey were given to twenty students. These students met after worship one Sunday. They were told that they did not have to sign their names. A list was kept of the students who took the survey by MIC. Some of the students were apprehensive about filling out the survey in that some intimate details would be shared. Others filled out the survey without reserve.

Another survey was given to the MIC group at the first night of the bible study before the class began. (See Appendix F). The questions on the survey dealt with knowledge of men in scripture who served in leadership positions. Other questions dealt with practical application of faith put into every day practice.

A post-test survey was given to the students who took the survey on the first of August (See Appendix G). Only sixteen of the twenty who took the pre-test were on hand to complete this form. Some of the findings will be shared in Chapter Five. On the last night of bible study in August, members of Men In Christ were asked to fill out the post-test survey that was similar to the pre-test that they took (See Appendix H).

Instrumentation

The pre-test survey taken by students required a yes or no response. It was felt by the context associates that this would be better received by the students. On the other hand, open-ended questions were given in the survey by men. It was felt that gaining feedback and insight from these men could be used as a basis for future training of the Men In Christ and also help to set goals and priorities. Many of these men had

grandchildren and nephews and nieces who were caught up in a life of aimlessness. Sadly, the men in the Men In Christ from Bethel Church were more open about filling in the surveys than the men in the group from other churches. This group, in no way however, shy away from the commitment and work of the group.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This project, "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults in Blount County Tennessee," proposes to make an assessment of some of the most pressing needs in the Blount County area facing youth and young adults. This project came about from a seed of a men's fellowship group that met at Bethel Church. About half of the men in this group were members of Bethel Church and the other half were men who had church membership elsewhere. Beginning as a time of fellowship meal and prayer, the seed was planted within this writer to use this group as a springboard for the project. The group gave itself the name "Men In Christ" though they sometimes refer to themselves as "Men in the Community."

This men served as a primary focus group. There are about seventeen men in this group though the meeting average is around twelve. Some of the men have jobs and other commitments that keep them away from the group. At a gathering in April of 2014, the writer shared with the group that he was in the doctoral program at United Theological Seminary and that part of his school work involved a ministry project that comes out of the context at Bethel Church and the larger community of Blount County. They were interested in this conversation and wanted to know the meaning of "context." The writer shared with them that the demographics, ministry and spiritual temperament all went into what constituted a context. RJ went on to share with them the meaning of

"synergy." He asked them to be in prayer for him and this school work and at the next meeting he would share with them how they could be a part of this.

At the May 2014 meeting, this pastor shared with the group part of his life's story as it related to vocation. As a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools and later as a counsellor, R J saw firsthand the many dynamics that young people face not only in the context of receiving an education but in life as well. While struggling with his call to ministry, he began to see his work with these students as a form of ministry. His vantage point of a counsellor gave him an audience with young people beyond that of what most teachers experienced. Many of these young people, having developed a trusting relationship with R J, shared some of their most innermost thoughts about what they faced in their homes, at school and among their peers. R J also got the opportunity to interface with many parents who were laboring rearing their children under the direst circumstances. R J's work in the Alcoa School System continued the observations of youth. He found himself at school more of a social worker than a guidance counsellor helping youth discern their vocational goal and assisting with applying for college. As a pastor who see these youth and young adults laboring trying to find their way, R J was moved to develop a ministry to address some of the challenges that they face. The men voted to accept this challenge and reorganized its focus from fellowship of in-reach to outreach. R J shared with the men that the biblical foundation for this work would be rooted in I Samuel 10:17-26 and Luke 5:17-26. R J read both passages and shared how each passage spoke to and dealt with men of faith who extended themselves in building up the community and outreach. He shared with them that part of the seminary requirement for this work would include professional associates and context associates.

He gave them an explanation for both of the groups and informed them that he would need some persons in MIC to serve as context associates as well.

Context Associates Chosen and Time Line Developed

After the commitment of these men and prayer, R J had a conversation with his wife about selecting persons to serve as context associates (which were named in Chapter Four). Attention was given to choosing persons who would be workers as well as being inclusive. He met with this selected group on July 24, 2014 at Bethel Church and shared with them his project proposal and got a commitment from them to serve. This group also includes some of the persons in the Men In Christ group. This group began its work by developing a pre-test survey. Questions were designed for young people in school. This immediately posed a problem in that R J wanted the project to be directed at students in high school as well as young adults. The context associates debated this and thought that they should focus primarily on students in high school. Afterward, attention could be given to young adults at a later date. Another area of discussion was discussed that gave R J pause and some disappointment. The women context associates lauded the pastor and the Men in Christ group for such a wonderful initiative; however, the group was caution about the throes and unforeseen problems of gearing this ministry toward young women, even though they were worthy of attention. The men were cautioned that it was unadvisable for men to tutor young women for many reasons. One of the reasons is that young high-school female teenagers should not be in isolated situations with grown males because of the potential for misunderstandings. The feeling was that it was okay for these men to tutor young females in an open setting in the church, but anything

beyond this was too risky. Everyone in the contextual associates group meeting agreed. Unfortunately, but rightly so, it was agreed that teen females would not be recruited for mentoring. They would, however, be allowed to attend any tutoring classes. The men in the group pledged to lend their voices, finances and support for any similar initiative for young teenagers that the church would undertake in the future.

The Project Time Line: (See Appendix I)

July 24th – Meet with context associates and develop pre-test survey

August 2nd – Pre-test Survey

Sermon Series

- August 3rd – Sermon – "A Band of Men (Part 1)" – I Sam 10:17-26
- August 10th – Sermon – "A Band of Men (Par 2)" – I Sam 10:17-26
- August 17th – Sermon – "Raising the Roof (Part 1)" – Luke 5:17-26
- August 24th – Sermon – "Raising the Roof (Part 2)" – Luke 5:17-26

Bible Study Series

- August 6th - I Sam 10:17-26
- August 13th - I Sam 10:17-26
- August 20th – Luke 5:17-26
- August 27th – Luke 5:17-26

Symposium – August 23rd at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. The presenters and their topics were:

- Judge Kelly Thomas: "The Judicial System and Youth Before It"
- Ms. Tracy Downs: "High School Requirements for Graduation"

- Dr. Scott Porter: "The Problem of Discipline and Its Repercussions"
- Officer Holly Hatcher: "Delinquency and Drug Abuse Among Students"
- Chianti Woodley: "Testimonial on Life's Experience"

August 28th – Post-test survey and data gathering.

Sermons Series: A Band of Men

The MIC group was a part of the ministry launch when a four-week sermon series was preached at Bethel Church for the four Sundays in August of 2014. The first two Sundays had as its text I Samuel 10:17-26. The subject of the sermon was "A Band of Men." This two-part sermon explored the events that surrounded and led to the confederated tribes of Israel being molded together as a nation. The seer-prophet Samuel, following the commands of the LORD, called the people together in an assembly. Out of this Saul, son of Kish, was taken by lot (chosen) as king. When the ceremony was over, Saul as well as others, departed for home. "Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched" [I Sam. 10:26]. First, God chooses unlikely persons for great things. Though the text does not say it, it is understood that there was something about Saul that was special in the sight of God. Saul was not from a popular tribe nor was he trained. He was lacking in so many things in the realm of leadership. Yet, God chose him. Sometimes it does not matter that one is young or unskilled. God is capable of making you into what God so desires. Second, God uses others (in this case men) to surround, support and help the one who is in a leadership capacity. Again, Saul was young, uneducated and had practically no experiences; yet, God surrounded him with men (warriors). Everyone in life needs

someone to have their back and help fight their battle. In this case it was a band of men. The work ahead of Saul was great. Nation building from the bottom is no small task. Unifying twelve loosely-connected confederated tribes was a great task. Yet, Saul did not have to do it alone. He was accompanied by a band of men. A parallel was given in how the Men In Christ group was a band of men undertaking a task to help strengthen a community. Third, more than skills and courage are needed for such an insurmountable task. God had to touch their hearts. The heart has been defined as the seat of the emotion. Too many hearts, even among people of faith, are cold and indifferent. The heart is something that has to be cleansed and directed. When the men of Gibeah left this convocation called by Saul, the writer says that God had touched their hearts. The text does not note their skills, age, intellect or resources. Rather, it speaks of men whose hearts were turn toward God in the uphill challenge of going along side of young King Saul to develop the nation of Israel. No matter what the task is, a faith that has a heart that is touched by God is essential and necessary for Christian discipleship. Though this sermon series was for everyone, particular attention was given to the Men in Christ group in that they too were embarking upon a needed work; and they needed hearts touched by God to be effective (See Appendix C).

Sermon Series: Raising the Roof

The text for the second two-week series was Luke 5:17-26. The subject of the sermon was "Raising the Roof."

William Barclay, in his book, *And He Had Compassion*, speaks to how, collectively, the gospel narratives are filled with people who are sick seeking help, Jesus

healing individuals and the pain and suffering associated with sickness and disease. In this text one sees a situation where a group of men had embarked upon a journey. The text does not tell the reader the names of the men, the name of the paralytic nor how far the men travelled to take the sick man to Jesus. We are told by one of the synoptic gospels that there were four men. This text lends itself to some windows of self-awareness and faith development.

First, the text, without saying it succinctly, expresses it as a given that these men, like Barclay's book implies, had compassion. Compassion means to demonstrate passion for the way one feels and to sympathetically enter into another's sorrow and pain. This is what is demonstrated by these men. The reader does not know what relationship, if any, the infirmed man had with these other men. This much is known: they cared. In this world in which one lives, there is so much of pain and suffering. Some of it is brought on by poor decisions one has made while some of it is brought on by outward circumstances. In the parable of the last judgment, Jesus does not speak about how the hungry, sick, or imprisoned came about their misfortune; rather, he speaks a word about how the judgment will be determined in how one responds to these individuals.

Secondly, the text speaks to the subject of persistence in matters of importance. These men could have met with the infirmed and prayed over him and left. But they didn't. They travelled, what may very well be a considerable distance, carrying dead weight: an immobile man on a mat. This required vigor and determination. When they reached their destination where Jesus was, they could not get in. The house was full and so was the outside court. They could have lauded themselves for going this far saying we gave it our best and turned around. But they didn't. They devised a plan to climb up on

the roof, hoist the infirmed man, removed roofing tiles and lowered the man at the feet of Jesus. This is quite moving in how they were persistent in getting the sick man to Jesus.

Thirdly, these were men of faith. They had perhaps either witnessed Jesus teaching and healing or heard about it. Either way, they had faith that if they could just get the infirmed man to Jesus, that Jesus would do the rest. On more than a few occasions, Jesus commented on individuals who had deep faith in him. Scripture says that one can do much with faith: even move mountains. Jesus forgave this man of his sins and healed them. This is a word not only for each hearer but also for others who need to know that there is one who heals and forgives.

Bible Study Series

The bible study was for the month of August on the four Wednesday evenings. The sermon preached the previous Sunday was explored in depth. On the first two Wednesdays, attention was given to I Samuel 10:17-26 text. The study looked at the make-up of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the work of Samuel, the seer/prophet, and how the people looked at their neighbors with kings and wanted a king as well – even though Samuel warned them about the downside of having a king. This study also explored how God touches hearts, has a unique purpose for each person, and how men of faith can be wedded together for a cause (See Appendix D). .

The bible study for the third and fourth Wednesdays of February covered the Luke 5:17-26 text. Again, the sermon the previous Sunday on the same text was amplified. In this text of the men carrying the infirmed man to Jesus, several themes were highlighted. One theme explored was that of helplessness. People in good health

may take it for granted. Several other themes explored were: the intervening of friends, the ingenuity of friends and the healing of Jesus (See Appendix D).

Symposiums

Judge Kelly Thomas from Blount County led a symposium on the judicial system and the do's and don'ts of students getting caught up in activities that land them in court. Some of such activities are truancy, fighting, cutting school, getting caught smoking or using drugs in school. Some of the persons who are caught up in these activities are remanded to Alcoa Alternative School (See Appendix J).

Tracy Downs, a high school counsellor at Alcoa High School, led a workshop on requirements for graduation from the freshman to senior year. She discussed the academic requirements. Many parents do not know what the requirements are and are unable to help their children (See Appendix K).

Dr. Scott Porter, principal of Alcoa High School, led a forum on educational perspectives. He discussed problems with discipline and put forth a tutoring program for students before classes begin. Students who drop out of school are directed to the GED program. This is led by Carol Ergenbright who also assists in employment. (This presentation did not have handouts).

Officer Holly Hatcher of the Alcoa Police Department led a workshop on penalty for delinquency, curfews, truancy and drug usage (See Appendix L).

Cheryl Flowers, Department of Labor, was invited to attend but was unable. She worked with Pastor Miller throughout the year for placement for high school students for

summer jobs. If they work out, they may be able to keep the jobs year round. Forms were sent for students to fill out seeking employment.

Collection of Data

On August 31st the post-test surveys were taken by the students who took the pre-test at an earlier date. As pointed out in the previous chapter, a mixed methodology was used in the development of the surveys. All of the pre-test surveys were closed ended questions requiring a "yes" or "no" response. The post-test survey were mainly open-ended questions requiring a written response. Some examples of the pre-test survey were:

1.	Do you enjoy learning new things in school?	YES	NO
2.	Have you spent time in the library studying?	YES	NO
3.	Do your parent(s) encourage your learning in school?	YES	NO
4.	Do you attend tutoring classes after school?	YES	NO
5.	Is learning important to you?	YES	NO
6.	Do you spend more than ten hours studying weekly?	YES	NO
7.	Have you ever had drug charges against yourself?	YES	NO
8.	Have you ever been arrested by the police?	YES	NO

These questions could be answered rather quickly. They required no extensive thought. On the other hand, the post survey questions were thoughtful in nature and required more time for the youth to ponder. Some of the examples of these questions are:

How has the mentoring and encouragement from MIC and tutors affected you in the following ways?

- Learning in school.
- Library habits.
- Seeking tutoring for needs.

How have the workshops on the judicial system and community policing affected you in the following ways?

- Loitering.
- Curfews.
- Bullying.
- Carrying weapons to school or otherwise.

If you are on probation/parole, would you be willing to become a part of a court-ordered mentoring from the Men In Christ group? ____ Yes ____No (Why?)

Again, the youth were asked to be honest in their responses in that the results would aid the Men In Christ group to better assess the efforts that were being put forth and how they could modify this ministry based on the needs as gleaned from the data. Seventeen youth responded to this survey. The session was marked with several youth asking questions for clarity. Again, the youth were told not to sign their names and were assured that once the answers were gathered and data extracted, the surveys would be destroyed.

Analysis of Data

Questions one and two on the pre-test spoke of "enjoyment of learning new things in school" and "library time." Of the sixteen surveys, eleven indicated that they enjoyed learning things in school while five did not. Fourteen enjoyed library and two did not. Question four and five addressed "receiving tutoring" and "whether or not learning was important." Only four persons indicated that they received tutoring; fifteen indicated that learning was important. On the questions that dealt with drug usage and court cases, six indicated that they had been arrested. On the questions of drug usage, four indicated that they had used drugs; eight indicated that they had not while eight did not answer the question.

On the post-test survey, all of the respondents were quite candid in their response. One observation that did not come about from the questions was the quality of the written responses. All of the responses indicated that the youth had difficulty in formal writing in that there were many glaring errors in syntax and punctuation. The first part of the post-test dealt with the subject of learning in school, library habits and seeking tutoring. Again, there were seventeen respondents. The collective narrative gleaned from these tests indicated the following:

- Learning was important but was difficult for twelve of the respondents.
- Two-thirds of the group had not really spent time in the library engaging in research or study.
- All of the students indicated that they would benefit from tutoring.

On the questions of loitering, curfews and bullying, the responses were varied. Some of the students had asked someone to define loitering. Ten of the responses indicated that

young people looked at this subject as "just hanging out" and that they wonder why the aspect of criminality was added to it. They looked at this as having something to do and hanging with friends. Eight respondents indicated that they had home curfews. Twelve did not realize that there was a city-wide curfew for minors. On the subject of bullying, thirteen indicated that they had been bullied and that it was on-going for six presently. Five indicated that they had bullied someone in the past. All five of these indicated that it was a part of the peer pressure of friends that lead to bullying. None of the students indicated that they had carried a weapon to school or otherwise. Five indicated that they knew of someone (youth) who had carried a weapon with them. No one indicated, however, that the weapon carrying was at school.

Some of the saddest observations were on the subject of family members assisting or hindering the school learning process. Five indicated that they had support and help from their parents in their homework. Eight indicated that they had little or no help in their school work. Six of these responses indicated that their parents were preoccupied with two jobs and had little time; four indicated that their parents were limited in their own learning to adequately assist them.

Outcome

There was a time of fellowship and dialogue with the students following the post-test. This writer observed that there was some degree of pain in the lives of most of the young men. Much of the pain came about following the discussion of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri. Two-thirds of these individuals think that they too can

become victims of being shot by police officers. This sentiment was not exclusive of this local community but in regards to being black in America.

There is an overall interest in learning but these students lack the tools for study habits and having a continuous place for tutoring. Surprisingly, only a few of them actually thought that college was in reach. Many of the respondents felt that society had already labeled them as thugs because of the color of their skin along with the ways that they dress and their hairstyle.

In each of these kids, there was a longing to do better and achieve. There was some outside pressure from some of their peers that kept them from becoming part of groups that were engaged in study and civic participation. It is the conclusion of this writer that there is hope for these young men if the church, through its ministries (including Men In Christ), would reach out in intentional ways to engage each of these persons in support by not only preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ but also in programs of self-esteem, the learning process and discerning vocational opportunities.

Men In Christ Surveys and Outcome

The pre and post-test surveys for the Men In Christ group added some interesting observations. Both surveys had open-ended questions. The themes and questions relating to leadership, mission, enlistment of other men and mentoring youth were some of the pre-test questions asked of the group. Ten men had taken the pre-test and nine took the post-test. Four of the men indicated that they were (or are) in leadership positions in their secular jobs and held leadership jobs in the church at some point. Three of the men indicated that they have been like a father figure or big brother figure to

young males but the relationship was not an intentional on-going one. Most of the men sensed that had not used faith language and images in their work. They see it more as something that they felt was important. Three, however, directly tied this work into their discipleship walk. Only three of the men had attended Sunday school and/or bible study regularly. All of these men resonated with the two passages of scripture explored. They enjoyed the idea of a men's bible study especially exploring biblical figures and their character. Most men felt that it would be necessary for each man to try and recruit other men for the Men In Christ and work toward making it a larger ecumenical group with a budget and officers.

CHAPTER SIX

METHODOLOGY

This project, "A Parish Base Model of Ministry for At-Risk Youth and Young Adults," was launched in August of 2014 at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Alcoa, Tennessee. The hypothesis of this endeavor is that a committed effort by a band of Christian men could, through outreach and the aid of the Holy Spirit, reach young people in this community and impact their lives in a positive way through mentoring and setting goals. This project was born out of a sense of outreach to youth and young adults. This writer's passion and life's work, with and among young people in public schools, gave him a perspective that many teachers and counsellors do not have. These students, with whom R J encountered and counselled, knew that he was a minister. As a result he was able to relate to them and bonded with them in a special way. So R J's passion and gifts for ministry intersected with the context of serving a church in a community where so many young people were, in the summation of Henry David Thoreau, "living lives of quiet desperation."

This ministry task was a bit overwhelming for some of the men in the Men In Christ group. Suggestions were made that perhaps the targeted audience would be better served if the Men In Christ volunteered for schools and community centers and engaged in mentoring youth or just making a financial contributions to such groups annually. Pastor Miller had to impress upon the men first that he had to bring forth a project as a

course requirement. Secondly, he had to be prophetic in his sharing with these men in terms of letting them know that to whom much is given is much required (Luke 12:48). Pastor Miller did not want to insult the men in the Men In Christ in that this group was more than a men's club of fellowship and meals. It was already engaged in some measures of outreach. What he wanted to impart was that more was required of them by way of a systematic, biblical led, discipleship deployed ministry. R J is proud to say that the men of this group rose to the occasion not just to assist him in a course requirement but to be better disciples.

Another glaring reality was that this was a ministry project and not a model of ministry. Like a living organism, the attitude and work of MIC continues to evolve and mushroom. Pastor Miller saw men in the group who were coy about speaking the language of faith and witnessing becoming more vocal in their Christian witness. Some of the wives of the men in the group took interest and part in the work of mentoring with their husbands in receiving young people in their homes. They also were present in the symposiums' workshops.

Professional and Contextual Associate Participation

R J is pleased to say that from the start the contextual associates were persons who were not only interested in the idea of the project but participated in a manner beyond his expectations. These persons participated in meetings, planning the events and the execution of the symposium as well as the on-going recognition celebrations of young people. All of these associates were well aware of the dire situation of youth in Blount County and Bethel Church. Many of the context associates know personally some of these youth (or some of their family members) through contact in church, public school

or from the community. These associate are committed disciples of Christ and did not have to be coaxed into being a part of a committee or this ministry project. Again, some of the context associates were participants in the group Men In Christ. On the other hand, some of the female associates put forth the idea of Bethel Church and religious leaders of the churches of Blount County starting a similar program (ministry initiative) for young female teens with a similar scope of ministry.

The professional associates were great and contributed to this ministry project. Two of the associates live in Blount County and are educators. Like the context associates, they too are familiar with the dire situation of young people (blacks in particular) in the county through their connections with the public schools. To some extent, these two educators had a better knowledge of some of these students through daily on-going contact with them in school. One of the associates who was a presenter at the symposium is a high school principal; he played a key role in this endeavor. It should not matter, but it should be noted that he is white. Another symposium presenter, the judge, is white also. R J has a long history with both of these gentleman in that he too was in the same school system for many years with one of them and is active in the civic affairs of the city. Last, but not least, R J's wife, Gloria, was a context associate, assisted in many ways with the publicity of the event and served as an assistant for some of the presenters. She in her own way contributed mightily not only in this ministry project but also all of the on-going activities of the church which includes the ministry of Men In Christ. Bethel Church served as the primary place where most of the events/activities took place. Many of its members are proud of the Men In Christ group and see themselves in partnership with its ministry.

A Dialogue with the Court

Having a judge to participate in this work was great. This judge is a person who has shown great interest in civic pride in the community. R J has a good relationship with him as does other men in the group. A part of the evolving aspect of this ministry project is to propose how the courts can assign young people who are convicted of minor offenses to a developing program at the Bethel Church (through Men In Christ) that teaches responsibility, civic pride, respect and self-esteem. This activity could be an option of the court to community service. Many persons assigned to community service wind up sometimes at non-profit organizations. Some are assigned to clean-up crews of the city. The on-going efforts of Men In Christ can develop a religious boot camp of sorts. R J believes, as the gospel proclaims, that lives can be changed and redirected. The word of God and the aid of the Holy Spirit offer everyone a knowledge that "they are the sons and daughter of God" (I John 3:1) and are a chosen people and members of a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9). This is indeed good news for an adolescent who is trying to find his way.

This project idea and work is critical in that it has the potential to reach and touch people. This pastor and the group realize that the objective of this proposed work is not evangelism, for this would cause a problem with the religion versus state matter. The focus would be again on self-esteem, respect for self and others and responsibility and making choices that sometimes lead to circumstances that will haunt an individual for life. Through the efforts of people (men) of faith, some of these persons would be moved not only by the demonstration of discipleship of these individuals but also by the spirit of God. Such an endeavor would not be rooted in a hit-and-miss approach; rather, it would

be developed in collaboration with the best minds in the areas of education (secondary and college), social workers, law enforcement, the courts and the church. Presently, there is nothing like this in Blount County or East Tennessee. One of the participants of the Men In Christ is a pastor who has experience in law enforcement on the federal level. He too would bring much to the table in planning and developing such a ministry. This judge who participated in the symposium would be open to having a dialogue with church leaders (MIC) about this subject and would be a willing participant.

Continued Work and Development of Men In Christ

Dreaming out loud, R J feels that the work of Men In Christ can lead to an academy of sort. Again, R J's wife is a retired educator such as he. There are also educators in both the professional associates and context associates groups. There has been talk among some of the persons in both group about the need to look at developing a charter school to reach this targeted youth section of the population. If this is not feasible, certainly a summer academy on the line of the model being considered for the courts could be considered. There are many capable adults in this community – active in the workforce and retired – that could plan, execute and staff such an academy. Financial resources would be needed. Mission dollars from the churches and the securing of grants could be considered for this. There is a discussion in the Men In Christ group to start a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization to aid in the funding of the academy idea. There are people in some of these churches who have experience writing grants and proposals. They could be called on to assist in this endeavor.

Unrealized Goal

It was apparent right away that the scope of the goal was too broad, especially in light of a five-to-seven-week project. Hence, the ministry project was not directed at young adults or teen females. In retrospect, the "young adult" part of the project title should be eliminated. R J was sadden by the attendance of the symposium in that he had hoped that the event would be much greater with both parents and youth. If R J were too implement this project at another church, more specifically, in another city, he would try to make the Men In Christ a truly interdenominational body with men from churches throughout the county. He would also consider having two different days for the symposium with the parents having a day by themselves.

R J is familiar with many well-to-do men and women in the community who are well educated and middle class. They are savvy enough to navigate the waters of the school system and city affairs. R J also knows of many parents who are not. Some of the students in which he interfaces with have parents who are limited in their ability to work through systems to achieve the best results for their children who are struggling educationally in school or have discipline problems. R J would also encourage the MIC group to develop a mission component among the men and youth wherein they could do some projects together for people or families in need.

Future Goals of Men In Christ

As a part of the on-going faith development of these men, this pastor sees a need for continued bible study accompanied by prayer. They should become more intentional in reaching out to other men in other churches to join the group. This pastor also sees the

need of the men taking a religious vocation survey to discern their own gifts and passion for ministry. So often pastors asks for volunteers for positions to be filled. R J's own faith development is leading this effort to help the Men In Christ to continue to be men of faith carrying on ministries in which they are gifted and have passion.

The Men In Christ group has enriched this pastor's life in many ways. This work stems from R J's on discovery and passion for ministry which has been rooted not only in the church of Christ but also in the lives of young men and women.

APPENDIX A

CENSUS DATA BLOUNT COUNTY TENNESSEE

People QuickFacts	Blount County	Tennessee
Population, 2014 estimate	NA	6,549,352
Population, 2013 estimate	125,099	6,497,269
Population, 2010 (April 1) estimates base	123,016	6,346,275
Population, percent change - April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014	NA	3.2%
Population, percent change - April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013	1.7%	2.4%
Population, 2010	123,010	6,346,105
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2013	5.2%	6.2%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2013	21.4%	23.0%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2013	17.9%	14.7%
Female persons, percent, 2013	51.5%	51.2%
White alone, percent, 2013 (a)	94.2%	79.1%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2013 (a)	2.9%	17.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2013 (a)	0.4%	0.4%
Asian alone, percent, 2013 (a)	0.9%	1.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2013 (a)	Z	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent, 2013	1.5%	1.7%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2013 (b)	3.0%	4.9%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2013	91.6%	74.9%
Living in same house 1 year & over, percent, 2009-2013	85.1%	84.6%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2009-2013	2.7%	4.6%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2009-2013	3.9%	6.6%
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013	86.7%	84.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013	20.8%	23.8%
Veterans, 2009-2013	11,723	484,901

Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2009-2013	23.9	24.3
Housing units, 2013	55,427	2,840,914
Homeownership rate, 2009-2013	73.3%	67.8%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2009-2013	11.3%	18.3%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2009-2013	$163,900	$139,200
Households, 2009-2013	48,728	2,475,195
Persons per household, 2009-2013	2.50	2.52
Per capita MONEY INCOME in past 12 months (2013 dollars), 2009-2013	$23,788	$24,409
Median household income, 2009-2013	$45,991	$44,298
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2009-2013	13.7%	17.6%

Business QuickFacts	**Blount County**	**Tennessee**
Private nonfarm establishments, 2012	2,285	130,592[1]
Private nonfarm employment, 2012	38,140	2,344,047[1]
Private nonfarm employment, percent change, 2011-2012	-0.3%	1.9%[1]
Nonemployer establishments, 2012	8,382	471,026
Total number of firms, 2007	10,063	545,348
Black-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	8.4%
American Indian- and Alaska Native-owned firms, percent, 2007	0.3%	0.5%
Asian-owned firms, percent, 2007	0.9%	2.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	0.1%
Hispanic-owned firms, percent, 2007	S	1.6%
Women-owned firms, percent, 2007	25.7%	25.9%
Manufacturers shipments, 2007 ($1000)	5,312,323	140,447,760
Merchant wholesaler sales, 2007 ($1000)	898,029	80,116,528
Retail sales, 2007 ($1000)	1,551,134	77,547,291
Retail sales per capita, 2007	$12,945	$12,563

Accommodation and food services sales, 2007 ($1000)	208,506	10,626,759
Building permits, 2013	370	23,816

Geography QuickFacts	Blount County	Tennessee
Land area in square miles, 2010	558.71	41,234.90
Persons per square mile, 2010	220.2	153.9
FIPS Code	009	47
Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area	Knoxville, TN Metro Area	

APPENDIX B

CENSUS DATA ALCOA TENNESSEE

People QuickFacts	Alcoa	Tennessee
Population, 2013 estimate	8,640	6,495,978
Population, 2010 (April 1) estimates base	8,431	6,346,113
Population, percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013	2.5%	2.4%
Population, 2010	8,449	6,346,105
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2010	6.2%	6.4%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2010	21.7%	23.6%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2010	16.3%	13.4%
Female persons, percent, 2010	52.2%	51.3%
White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	79.1%	77.6%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	14.0%	16.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.2%	0.3%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.5%	1.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	Z	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.6%	1.7%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	6.8%	4.6%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010	76.4%	75.6%
Living in same house 1 year & over, percent, 2009-2013	80.0%	84.6%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2009-2013	3.4%	4.6%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2009-2013	6.0%	6.6%
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013	85.3%	84.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013	21.1%	23.8%
Veterans, 2009-2013	750	484,901
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2009-2013	19.0	24.3
Housing units, 2010	4,175	2,812,133
Homeownership rate, 2009-2013	62.7%	67.8%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2009-2013	20.8%	18.3%

Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2009-2013	$119,800	$139,200
Households, 2009-2013	3,856	2,475,195
Persons per household, 2009-2013	2.21	2.52
Per capita money income in past 12 months (2013 dollars), 2009-2013	$21,730	$24,409
Median household income, 2009-2013	$39,258	$44,298
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2009-2013	19.0%	17.6%

Business QuickFacts	**Alcoa**	**Tennessee**
Total number of firms, 2007	897	545,348
Black-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	8.4%
American Indian- and Alaska Native-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	0.5%
Asian-owned firms, percent, 2007	S	2.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	0.1%
Hispanic-owned firms, percent, 2007	F	1.6%
Women-owned firms, percent, 2007	17.5%	25.9%

Manufacturers shipments, 2007 ($1000)	D	140,447,760
Merchant wholesaler sales, 2007 ($1000)	298,013	80,116,528
Retail sales, 2007 ($1000)	869,519	77,547,291
Retail sales per capita, 2007	$100,943	$12,563
Accommodation and food services sales, 2007 ($1000)	76,283	10,626,759

Geography QuickFacts	**Alcoa**	**Tennessee**
Land area in square miles, 2010	14.73	41,234.90
Persons per square mile, 2010	573.5	153.9
FIPS Code	00540	47
Counties	Blount County	

APPENDIX C

SERMON SERIES

"A Band of Men"

The subject of this sermon is "A Band of Men" (I Samuel 19:17-26). This two-part sermon explores the events that surround and led to the confederated tribes of Israel being molded together as a nation. The seer-prophet Samuel, following the commands of the LORD, called the people together in an assembly. Out of this, Saul, son of Kish, was taken by lot (chosen) as king. When the ceremony was over, Saul as well as others, departed for home. "Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched" [I Sam. 10:26].

First, God chooses unlikely persons for great things. Though the text does not say it, it is understood that there was something about Saul that was special in the sight of God. Saul was not from a popular tribe nor was he trained. He was lacking in so many things in the realm of leadership. Yet, God chose him. Sometimes it does not matter that one is young or unskilled. God is capable of making you into what God so desires.

Second, God uses others (in this case men) to surround, support and help the one who is in a leadership capacity. Again, Saul was young, uneducated and had practically no experiences; yet, God surrounded him with men (warriors). Everyone in life needs someone to have their back and help fight their battle. In this case it was a band of men. The work ahead of Saul was great. Nation building from the bottom is no small task. Unifying twelve loosely-connected confederated tribes was a great task. Yet, Saul did not have to do it alone. He was accompanied by a band of men. A parallel given here is how the Men In Christ group is a band of men undertaking a task to help strengthen a community.

Third, more than skills and courage are needed for such an insurmountable task. God had to touch their hearts. The heart has been defined as the seat of the emotion. Too many hearts, even among people of faith, are cold and indifferent. The heart is something that has to be cleansed and directed. When the men of Gibeah left this convocation called by Saul, the writer says that God had touched their hearts. The text does not note their skills, age, intellect or resources. Rather, it speaks of men whose hearts were turn toward God in the uphill challenge of going along side of young King Saul to develop the nation of Israel. No matter the task, a faith that has a heart that has been touched by God, is essential and necessary for Christian discipleship. Though this sermon series is for everyone, particular attention is given to the Men in Christ group in that they too were embarking upon a needed work; and they needed hearts touched by God to be effective.

"Raising the Roof"

The subject of this sermon is "Raising the Roof." William Barclay, in his book, *And He Had Compassion*, speaks to how, collectively, the gospel narratives are filled with people who are sick seeking help, Jesus healing individuals and the pain and suffering associated with sickness and disease. In this text one sees a situation where a group of men had embarked upon a journey. The text does not tell the reader the names of the men, the name of the paralytic nor how far the men travelled to take the sick man to Jesus. We are told by one of the synoptic gospels that there were four men. This text lends itself to some windows of self-awareness and faith development.

First, the text, without saying it succinctly, expresses it as a given that these men, like Barclay's book implies, had compassion. Compassion means to demonstrate passion for the way one feels and to sympathetically enter into another's sorrow and pain. This is what is demonstrated by these men. The reader does not know what relationship, if any, the infirmed man had with these other men. This much is known: they cared. In this world in which one lives, there is so much of pain and suffering. Some of it is brought on by poor decisions one has made while some of it is brought on by outward circumstances. In the parable of the last judgment, Jesus does not speak about how the hungry, sick, or imprisoned came about their misfortune; rather, he speaks a word about how the judgment will be determined in how one responds to these individuals.

Secondly, the text speaks to the subject of persistence in matters of importance. These men could have met with the infirmed and prayed over him and left. But they didn't. They travelled, what may very well be a considerable distance, carrying dead weight: an immobile man on a mat. This required vigor and determination. When they reached their destination where Jesus was, they could not get in. The house was full and so was the outside court. They could have lauded themselves for going this far saying we gave it our best and turned around. But they didn't. They devised a plan to climb up on the roof, hoist the infirmed man, removed roofing tiles and lowered the man at the feet of Jesus. This is quite moving in how they were persistent in getting the sick man to Jesus.

Thirdly, these were men of faith. They had perhaps either witnessed Jesus teaching and healing or heard about it. Either way, they had faith that if they could just get the infirmed man to Jesus, that Jesus would do the rest. On more than a few occasions, Jesus commented on individuals who had deep faith in him. Scripture says

that one can do much with faith: even move mountains. Jesus forgave this man of his sins and healed them. This is a word not only for each hearer but also for others who need to know that there is one who heals and forgives.

APPENDIX D

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

I Samuel 10:17-26

The bible study was for the month of August on the four Wednesday evenings. On the first two Wednesdays in the month, attention was given to the sermon preached the previous Sundays and was explored in depth. The themes explored were:

God touches heart of people who are called and who are open to God's revelation: Examples were given of people in history including Abram, Moses, Joshua and some of the prophets and Paul.

God's involvement in nation building: Just as God sought to build the nation on principles and faith, God is involved today in building up the churches and para church organizations.

God's call has a purpose attached to it: For Saul (and the band of men accompanying him), it was for building the nation. Again examples were give of Moses and his assignment in leading the people out of Egyptian bondage. Joshua led the people in war. Hezekiah led the people in reform.

God leads people into rallying around a cause: Some examples are the men of Gibeah who travelled with Saul rallying together to protect and serve, and the rallying of the people of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership to rebuild the wall.

God still calls and touches hearts today. Some of the examples given were people in history such as Martin Luther King, Jr., The Berrigan Brothers (Catholic Priests who were antiwar advocates), Charles Colson (prison ministry).

Concluding Reminder: The persons God calls and uses all have flaws. Our sinfulness does not exempt anyone in that God forgives, cleanses, redirects and sends forward.

Luke 5:17-26

The bible study for the third and fourth Wednesdays of August covered the Luke 5:17-26 text. Again, the sermon preached the previous Sunday on the same text was amplified. In this text of the men carrying the infirmed man to Jesus, several themes were highlighted.

The theme of helplessness of the infirmed man: Attention was given to the overall theme of sickness that runs throughout the bible. It is quite poignant in the gospel narratives. One-third of the gospel was given to identifying some of them. Parallels were drawn of people in churches and society today who are sick and helpless.

The theme of intervening by friends: These men who cared for and carried the infirmed intervene on this man's behalf. This is the crux of Christian discipleship – that of intervening/caring for/sharing with those in need.

The theme of ingenuity: The friends, unable to get in the front door because of the crowd, cut a hole in the roof and lowered the man into the room. People of faith throughout the years have done this. They used their creativity with meager or no resources to do wonderful things. Some examples were cited.

The themes of Jesus healing and forgiving sins: All have sin and fallen short of the glory of God. During the time of Jesus, the prevailing religious attitude of many Jews was that sickness was because of sin. This was debated robustly. The text did not say that this was the case with the infirmed man; nonetheless, Jesus forgave him of his sins and healed him.

Concluding note: All are in need of forgiveness of sins and healing.

One theme explored was that of helplessness. People in good health make take it for granted. Several other themes explored was: the intervening of friends, the ingenuity of friends and the healing of Jesus.

APPENDIX E

PRE TEST SURVEY

A Ministry Addressing At-Risk Youth

Pre-Test Survey

August 3, 2014

1.	Do you enjoy learning new things in school?	YES	NO
2.	Have you spent time in the library studying?	YES	NO
3.	Do your parent(s) encourage your learning in school?	YES	NO
4.	Do you attend tutoring classes after school?	YES	NO
5.	Is learning important to you?	YES	NO
6.	Do you spend more than ten hours studying weekly?	YES	NO
7.	Have you ever had drug charges against yourself?	YES	NO
8.	Have you ever been arrested by the police?	YES	NO
9.	Have you ever been convicted by a judge/jury in court?	YES	NO
10.	Are you on probation?	YES	NO
11.	Do you have a case pending?	YES	NO
12.	Do you attend a faith organization/church service?	YES	NO
13.	Are you a member of a faith organization/church?	YES	NO
14.	Do your parent/parents attend a church?	YES	NO
15.	Does your family attend church regularly?	YES	NO
16.	During the past year, have you carried a weapon to school?	YES	NO
17.	Have you been bullied in school or in your community	YES	NO

APPENDIX F

PRE TEST SURVEY (MIC)

Bible Study Survey Awareness

Have you ever thought of the bible as a tool for fostering faith development among men's groups? _____Yes _____No

Name a biblical character and cite what leadership role he played in faith development.

What is meant by men of faith?

Name any civic or social group that was founded by men of faith.

Prior to joining the Men In Christ group, were you ever a part of a men's fellowship group? If so, did the group have a mission or function beyond fellowship and meals.

What is the greatest value of the Men In Christ group?

If you could name a particular mission or function of the MIC, what would it be?

Have you ever enlisted another man to be a part of the MIC group?

Have you ever intentionally mentored a young person? If so, what do you think the greatest contribution was?

APPENDIX G

POST TEST SURVEY

A Ministry Addressing At-Risk Youth

Pre-Test Survey

August 31, 2014

How have the mentoring and encouragement from MIC and tutors affected the following ways?

- **Learning in school.**
- **Library habits.**
- **Seeking tutoring for needs.**

How have the workshops on the judicial system and community policing affected you in the following ways?

- **Loitering.**
- **Curfews.**
- **Bullying.**
- **Carrying weapons to school or otherwise.**

If you are on probation/parole, would you be willing to become a part of a court-ordered mentoring from the Men In Christ group? _____ Yes _____No

Why?

Would you be willing to be a member of a young adult church group with bible study times and places negotiated? _____ Yes ___No

Why

What factors in your home help you or hinder you in your approach to school work?

APPENDIX H

POST TEST SURVEY (MIC)

Bible Study Survey Awareness

Following the sermon series and bible study series on texts that speak to men's response and understanding of leadership, please respond to the following questions:

How has the biblical stories and images of men mentoring others impacted the way that you see yourself as a disciple?

Which biblical character that you admire the most or see similarities in yourself?

How do you respond to the question: What is meant by men of faith?

Do you see the Men In Christ expanding to other churches or becoming a part of a district association?

Would you be open to being a part of a study series looking at men of faith in Scripture as an on-going bible study?

What is the greatest value of the Men In Christ group?

What activity or event would you like to see Men In Christ active in?

Would you be willing to enlist another man to be a part of the MIC group?

How has mentoring a youth enriched your life in faith development?

APPENDIX I

PROJECT TIME LINE

Project Timeline

July 24th – Meet with context associates and develop pre-test survey

August 2nd – Pre-test Survey

Sermon Series

- August 3rd – Sermon – "A Band of Men (Part 1)" – I Sam. 10:17-26
- August 10th – Sermon – "A Band of Men (Par 2)" – I Sam. 10:17-26
- August 17th – Sermon – "Raising the Roof (Part 1)" – Luke 5:17-26
- August 24th – Sermon – "Raising the Roof (Part 2)" – Luke 5:17-26

Bible Study Series

- August 6th - I Sam. 10:17-26
- August 13th - I Sam. 10:17-26
- August 20th – Luke 5:17-26
- August 27th – Luke 5:17-26

Symposium – August 23rd at Bethel Baptist Church

- Judge Kelly Thomas: "The Judicial System and Youth Before It"
- Ms. Tracy Downs: "High School Requirements for Graduation"
- Dr. Scott Porter: "The Problem of Discipline and Its Repercussions"
- Officer Holly Hatcher: "Delinquency and Drug Abuse Among Students"

August 28th Post-test survey and data gathering

APPENDIX J

SYMPOSIUM ON JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Judge Kelly Thomas, Presenter

Below is a summary of this Symposium

The whole point of juvenile court is not to punish. It's for the judge to give facts about the matter that can help the young person. The young person will need a lot of time to prepare, but if they don't prepare now, they will regret it later. There is also a provision that emergency custody can be gained for the state to prevent any kind of impending danger or event – a temporary order could be sought.

Anybody involved in juvenile court has the right to an attorney. The child has a right to an attorney. The judge may appoint a guardian in case there is some difference between what the child thinks and what the parent thinks. Everybody doesn't have the kind of parents that the kids who are attending this meeting have. There may be a disagreement between the child and the guardian. We have a new juvenile judge in this county – Keylon Foster. She is young and she is bright. She has two children of her own and is a good lawyer and would be a good juvenile court judge. Wise beyond her years, a single mom for a while and a clerk for a while.

There is a tie-in to students being active and getting good grades to those who are not when an inventory is taken of who comes before Juvenile Court the most. One of the things that is most important is school activities, whether music, sports, public service, etc. It is part of your education. One of the best indicators in school is whether a child is reading on grade level in 3rd grade. That's pretty simple but pretty scary. Your outcome is decided by the time you are 9 years old. That's not to say the door is closed and you can't go any further, but that what you do and what friends and teachers do at an early

age is very important. Juvenile court sees some young people commit serious crimes. Most of that - 52% of violent crimes -- happens during school time on school days in the hours immediately following school. It's a huge fight. Violent crimes on Non-school days is between 8-9 p.m. On school days it is between 3-4p.m. We have roughly the same number of school and non-school days during the year. We can do more to impact our children with after school programs than we can with curfews because the bulk of the violent crimes are committed after school as opposed to during curfew hours. I'm big on after school programs. Who you hang with is important. I wish you would help me because Mr. Hill and I are involved in the boys and girls club because we are interested in what you want to be involved in after school. If you go to sports, that's one thing, or going home.

At the Boys and Girls Club, we are starting a music program with instruments. We just got a $10,000 grant to start the program over at Fort Craig. We have made up an area near Maryville College students. Its set up really neat, but we want to know what does 15-16 years old want to do. We are open during the evenings in the school year and during the summer.

What do you all like and then we can talk about how we can get it. What's fun? Does everyone have their own laptop or electronic device? You are taking the world with you. We just want to know what do you like so you can come and hang out with us. There's a need to have safe places, educational places for our kids to go after school.

If you are feeling down and low, go help somebody that's having a harder time than you are. That's the way God made us. The thing that really makes us feel the best is helping

somebody. That's the way we're wired. Your self-esteem and self-worth are worth everything.

The presentation was followed by a time of questions and answers.

APPENDIX K

SYMPOSIUM ON COUNSELOR'S ROLE

Ms. Tracy Downs, Presenter

August 23, 2014

Below is a synopsis of the Presentation

I believe that part of this generation's problems is they have too many distractions. They have Twitter, Xbox, Facebook, etc., so there is a lot of drama. The key here is that they must be involved in something. As Judge Kelly stated, the time between 3-4 is crucial. If there is something that you want to see at school, let someone know. Colleges and employers want to see a well-rounded person. They want to see students volunteering in communities, giving back, and being involved in extracurricular work. This year I have 11-12th grade students. We try to get them on a college path. What I do is start from the top and plan backward. I try to find out what they want to do and ask them where do you see yourself in 10-20 years; and then I work backwards from there. The first thing you need to know is what do I need for graduation. We want everyone to have a high school diploma, but that is really the beginning. For the most part, with a high school diploma you are not going to be competitive anymore. When you look at today's requirement, when I graduated, you had to have 2 years of math, now you have to have 4, along with 4 years of English, 3 credits of science, and 2 years of foreign language. At Alcoa we have CP electives, health science program, health marketing programs and STEM programs; and we have fine arts , humanities and PE. As a freshman coming in it's so important to stay on top of your grades. In elementary and middle school, a lot of kids say its (grades) are not that important; but when you get to high school, especially in the 9th grade, it is the most critical year because it sets the stage for high school; so no matter what you did in middle school, when you get to high school, it's a brand new slate. You want to have a

strong foundation in 9th grade and 10th grade because you can't wait to be a senior and say "Oh, how do I get my GPA to a 3.0 and it's a 1.2; trust me it isn't going to happen. You must come in with a mindset that this is the beginning of your future. You must stay focused in getting out of high school and have a goal with options. A way to stay open with options is to stay on top of your grades. You have to come to school, and when you come, you can't be involved with the cliques, or drama, or bullying or what else is going on. You must be focused on the end result. It has to be in you to want to succeed and want to challenge yourself; but you need to set yourself up that people are offering you money to come to their school or scholarships for free to come to their school. Another way is your ACT scores. We are fortunate that we do offer ACT prep to our juniors. They (10th graders) do take a planned test this year, which is a predictor of their real ACT scores. The planned test will be offered in October. Basically, the plan is a predictor of their performance on the ACT, but it will also give you their strengths and weaknesses; and it tells you if they are on track for the college readiness benchmark part. I tell my students, when you get your results back, that's what you need to study for the ACT. It also tells you what questions you answered correctly and what questions incorrectly. Some will even tell you how to work out the problem, so use that to study for the ACT. Also the Army has a good website called March to Success.org and it's free; and you don't have to sign up or commit to a time. When you think about graduating with options, the government has this TN Promise and that information gives the opportunity for two years free and they can even go to some 4 year schools that offer 2-year programs.

APPENDIX L

PRESENTATION BY OFFICER HATCHER

Officer Holly Hatcher, Alcoa Police Department, Presenter

August 23, 2014

Officer Hatcher gave a presentation on the current reality of many young people (of all races) who violate the city's Municipal Codes (some unknowingly). She spoke to how parents, pastors and community leaders could address these issues along with the schools. After her presentation, there was a question and answer period. This was followed by a considerable amount of time given to the subject of curfew violations that lead to arrests. This is sometimes complicated by youth fleeing from the police and sometimes resisting arrest. If the youth who is detained by police are in possession of drugs and/or a weapon, things are then compounded with a curfew infraction leading to more serious charges.

Alcoa Municipal Code Section 11-708 – Curfew for Minors

Alcoa Municipal Code Section 11-708 address curfew for minors. "It is unlawful for any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday to loiter, wander, stroll or play in or upon the public streets, sidewalks, highways, roads, alleys, parks, playgrounds or other public grounds, public places, public buildings, place of amusement, eating places, vacant lots or any place unsupervised by an adult having the lawful authority to be at such places between the hours of 10:30 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Sunday through Friday and between the hours of 11:30 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Friday through Sunday, with some exceptions. The exceptions include when the person is accompanied by an adult; or an authorized errand or out during curfew hours while employed. However, if a police officer observes a person who appears to be under the age of eighteen years of age, he or she has the authority to detain that person to determine if they ae in violation of the curfew laws.

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